

HEBREWS VERSE BY VERSE - The New and Living Way - Part fifty-one

Sunday, May 13th, 2018 - 10:00 a.m. - Teaching #2047

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THE HAND OF GOD IN THE WORK OF YOUR ENEMIES

Hebrews 12:3-11 - "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."

We have just finished studying two of the most famous verses, not only in the letter to the Hebrews, but in the whole New Testament. Especially those opening words of that second verse have such a resounding poetic ring - "...**looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith!**" The magnificent phrasing sounds affirming and majestic. They resonate.

In our text today our writer opens with the same idea but points it in a slightly different direction. We are more bluntly told to "**Consider him....**"(3). But this consideration is different from "**looking to**" Him as founder and perfecter of our faith. This is a consideration, not first of all of **our** faith, but of **His** endurance to opposition.

We are reminded of the **relational conflict** - the **contradiction** - between our Lord and the **sinful culture** He came to redeem. In fact, that word - "**contradiction**" - is the word the translators of the old King James Version actually placed in this third verse - "**For consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds**"(3 KJV).

That word "**contradiction**" is defined by the dictionary as "**a direct opposition between things compared - an assertion of the contrary or opposite.**" This is what we're being called to "**consider**" in today's text. This is how our writer describes Jesus **in contradiction to the culture He came to redeem**.

What we need to do now is examine **why** our writer takes his readers - including you and me - in this particular direction. Why does he begin wrapping up his letter mining the meaning of the **contradiction - the polar-opposite tension** - between our sinless Lord and His sinful culture?

1) **IT'S EASY TO STUDY OUR LORD'S WONDERFUL MINISTRY TO HIS SURROUNDING CULTURE WITHOUT GIVING EQUAL ATTENTION TO THAT CULTURE'S RESPONSE TO HIS WORDS**

Hebrews 12:3 - "Consider him who endured **from sinners such hostility against himself**, so that you may not grow weary or fainthearted."

If you study the words and deeds of Jesus only as a study of **what Jesus was like in Himself** you will never end up "**considering**" what our writer directs us to in this verse. In a real sense we're not studying **Jesus** in this verse. We're considering the common **response to Jesus**. Our writer is demanding consideration of not just what Jesus said and did **in isolation**, but the general **cultural reaction** to what Jesus said and did.

It's the **cultural kick-back** we're being called to consider. And the way our writer words this is striking. We're actually told there is no way to fight **weariness**(3) if we just look at the wonderful things Jesus **did**. No. You fight spiritual weariness by remembering the beauty and light of Jesus - usually brought "**hostility**" in response.

In fact, if we just look at the wonderful things Jesus said and did **in isolation** from the hostility He received in response we will find the hostility **we** receive from following Him all that much more surprising and irritating and deflating. We won't have spiritually **trained ourselves to expect it**.

After all, wouldn't everyone love Jesus? Look how glorious He is! We will be shocked and confused and wearied facing the same cultural rejection because we never deeply "**considered**" it in the life of our Lord either.

2) MOST PEOPLE DON'T DEPART FROM THE FAITH FOR INTELLECTUAL REASONS

Hebrews 12:3 - "Consider him who endured from sinners such hostility against himself, so that you may not grow weary or fainthearted."

The important words in this verse are those two little connecting words, "**so that.**" This is our writer's way of saying, "Here's the **reason** I'm insisting you think of the **contradictory pressure** faced by Jesus from His culture. You need to consider this all the time **"so that"** you won't get worn out in your walk of discipleship **in the same kind of world.**"

In other words, we're being told how Christians usually **wear out** in their walk of faith. We're being told **how** they "**grow weary**" and **how** they become "**fainthearted**"(3). And the way it happens, we're told, is they don't expect enough **cultural rejection**. They don't expect enough of a **contradictory relationship** with the culture around them. And the reason they don't is they've studied everything wonderful about Jesus **except** that He was almost universally rejected as He walked this earth.

Christians study the Sermon on the Mount, the atonement, the resurrection from the grave, the miracles, the compassion and outreach - the divine/human nature - they study virtually **everything** there is to know about Jesus - **except** that none of this removed the cultural tension that led to His execution. They don't **expect** to be treated the way Jesus was treated. And that, says our writer, is the primary cause of spiritual fatigue and defeat.

Think about it. How many Christians do you know who left the faith because someone conclusively **proved** to them Jesus never rose from the dead? Do you know any? Now, how many people do you know who **wore out in terms of loyalty to Jesus** because of the appeal of friends they didn't want to lose for Christ or the embarrassment they received on campus or the fear of being considered out of touch or intolerant?

Just so there's no confusion here. There is no **cultural rejection to our showing the love of Jesus**. This can be done with no words at all and the whole church is called to participate in this passionately. There is no **cultural hurt** in this. People generally love to see anyone - Christian or atheist - feeding the poor, building health clinics, promoting clean drinking water, training in literacy, or providing shelter for refugees. When Christians do these things everyone **embraces** these loving portrayals of Jesus.

And that shouldn't surprise us because everyone **loved to see Jesus doing these things as well - just so long as not on the Sabbath.**

The problem is this isn't **all** Jesus did. And it's not **all** the Christian church is commissioned to do either. The problem comes with the **words** of Jesus. It's some of the things He **insisted on**. It's some of the things He insisted **we say too** if we're going to use the name "**Christian,**" or, "**disciple**" at all.

The problem arises because every Christian and every authentic church is called upon to do **three** things, not just **one**:

First, every Christian is called upon to **show the love of Jesus**. This can be done without words at all and carries little or no cultural cost.

Second, every Christian is called upon to **proclaim the gospel of redemption through Christ alone**. This is where the cultural **contradiction** heats up. This takes - demands - **words**. It demands saying things our culture denies.

Third, every Christian is called to **defend** the gospel against other options for divine rescue. The gospel is not the only message on the cultural table. We are called to expose error. We're called upon to lovingly tell lost people they are wrong. This is where cultural rejection is the strongest.

Just to recap. Our writer assumes if we are saying what Jesus said we will experience the same cultural hostility. And he tells us to **consider** this fact regularly to keep us from becoming "**weary**" or "**losing heart**"(3).

3) CULTURAL PUSH-BACKS ARE NOT ONLY DIFFICULT, THEY CAN CAUSE US TO BECOME SPIRITUALLY OBTUSE AND FORGETFUL

Hebrews 12:4-8 - "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."***

Here are the truths our trials can make us forget:

- a) ***Our cultural struggles are not unique to us. And they aren't as severe as they have been throughout history.*** Our trials tend to make us ***self-absorbed***. It gets easy to imagine no one else can appreciate what we're facing.

This is the reason for our writer's quick reminder to these persecuted Hebrew disciples - ***Hebrews 12:4 - "In your struggle against sin you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood."***

And, of course, he calls his readers back to his closing words in ***Hebrews 11:36-38 - "Others suffered mocking and flogging, and even chains and imprisonment. [37] They were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were killed with the sword. They went about in skins of sheep and goats, destitute, afflicted, mistreated— [38] of whom the world was not worthy—wandering about in deserts and mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth."***

- b) ***As our trials increase our discomfort they can distract our attention from the truth of God's Word regarding His plan and purpose.*** The crush of outward pressure can seem to outweigh divine revelation. The result is ***spiritual forgetfulness***:

Hebrews 12:5-6 - "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.'"

The Biblical truths needing the most mental repetition are those that have to push through the counterweight of our discomfort. That's the anguish in our writer's heart as he asks, ***"Have you forgotten the exhortation that addresses you as sons....?"***

He doesn't mean they have become ***unaware*** those verses from Proverbs exist. He means have they let the ***weight of those words diminish in their present discomfort?*** Are they ***remembering*** those words as they battle against ***weariness*** and ***faintheartedness***(3)?

The truth from God's Word - that didn't seem obvious to them in the heat of the moment - is the persecution and trial they are experiencing out of devotion to Jesus ***aren't*** a sign God has either ***forgotten*** them or is ***rejecting*** them. Their present struggle is the sign God is ***receiving*** them - ***Hebrews 12:6 - "For the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives."***

There is something of a teaching moment here for all of us. Almost every song, poster, and best-seller will speak of God's love in terms of His embrace and comfort. All of which is true enough. There is something that is naturally responsive to those soothing reminders of our loving Father's tender heart toward His redeemed children.

But our writer reminds us if we consider our Father's love for us ***only*** in these comforting terms we will be confused at much of His sovereign work in our daily lives. We will not identify or recognize much of His most precious, loving work on our behalf - not in making us ***comfortable***, but in making us ***mature and strong - spiritually developed and Christ-like***.

The lesson here is God has many different ways to keep us from becoming ***"weary"*** and ***"fainthearted"***(3) - many of which go beyond merely hugging us. His Fatherly love is ***deep*** and ***multi-faceted***, and ***infinitely wise*** and ***long-term*** in its intentions.

Remember where we are in this text. We're considering the two things our struggles can make us slow to remember. ***First, we can forget we are merely participating in the procession of all believers throughout history*** (4). And ***second, we can forget our struggles are a sign of God deeply receiving us***, not ***abandoning us***(5-8).

4) **IN ALL OUR PRESENT STRUGGLES WE MUST REMEMBER THE KIND OF WORK FATHER GOD IS DEEPENING IN OUR LIVES**

Hebrews 12:9-10 - "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."

If you look carefully you can immediately spot the contrast our writer is painting in these carefully worded verses. Earthly fathers engage in discipline as it seems "**best to them**"(10). Take note. This doesn't mean what they did was necessarily best for **us**. They did what **seemed** best "**to them.**" And if they exercised poor judgment even their best intentions were **destructive** rather than **helpful**. Even terrible parents can still be doing what mistakenly "**seems best to them.**"

Not so with our heavenly Father. That's why He is called the "**Father of spirits**"(9). This is the only place this title is used in the Scripture and it's used to remind us God deals **perfectly in the spiritual realm**. He doesn't just do what **seems right to Him**. Everything He does is absolutely and objectively "**for our good**"(10). If we understand the divine purpose in our struggles - if we don't **mis-read** our discomfort - Father God will make us all holier people. Always. Without fail.

5) **ALWAYS GIVE GOD THE BENEFIT OF THE DOUBT. WAIT FOR GOD'S TIMING**

Hebrews 12:11 - "**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.**"

Again our writer paints the contrast between two vantage points. If you look at the struggle of the moment you will only see the pain in the struggle. Many times we are outnumbered by the mocking voices of our culture. Many times our values are made to appear ridiculous. We lose rights. We feel the loneliness or the embarrassment. There is absolutely nothing pleasant in "**the moment.**"

God always works from another vantage point. He works through our struggles the way a gardener grows fruit. You can't see what is **best** in the garden until **harvest**.

This is always what the Bible is talking about when it talks about our **faith** being precious like gold and worth all efforts at being **purified**. God is training all of us through our struggles. He is bringing us in close - "**receiving us**" as the text says (12:6). He is **training** us for a day still in the future.

Such is our loving Father's discipline. It will eventually disappear in two places. It will not exist in hell because there will be no chance for growth or redemption. And it will not be present in heaven because we will all be like our blessed Lord in completeness. Always keep the long view in the center of your growing heart.