

Hebrews 12:1-11 – Endure Loving Discipline

Chapter 11 included a number of Old Testament believers who had faith in God and God's promises. The examples showed that they not only had faith but a faith which endured under difficult circumstances. The author was encouraging the hearers/readers of the letter of Hebrews to not abandon their faith. Do not "return to Egypt". Do not return to the shadows, copies and patterns of the Mosaic law which have now been fulfilled by Jesus Christ. Cling to the better hope, the better covenant, the better sacrifice and the better priest. Chapter 12 continues this line of exhortation.

Read Hebrews 12:1-3.

Verse 1 begins the takeaway from the chapter on faith. What does it mean to be surrounded by a cloud of witnesses? The witnesses were the examples of faith mentioned in chapter 11. Some translations have "crowd" or "host" for "cloud". The word is only used once in the NT. A number of commentators believe that the author was using the language of a stadium filled with spectators watching an athletic contest. What action should the recognition of these witnesses result in? "Race" comes from a Greek word that can generally mean an athletic competition. Since we are exhorted to "run", "race" makes the most sense in the context. Are we running a sprint or a marathon? (12:1)

After the encouragement to be inspired by the examples of faith in chapter 11, verse 2 exhorts us to look to Jesus. How was Jesus described? We already saw the word "founder" in 2:10 where Jesus was called "the founder of their salvation". There is a sense in the original words of "first and last" or "beginning and end". "Perfecter" does tie back to 10:14. Jesus has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified. From verse 2, what example did Jesus provide for us? (12:2)

In verse 3, what example did Jesus provide for us? This reminds me of John 15:18-19. The world hated Jesus first and now the world hates anyone who follows Jesus. (12:3)

Read Hebrews 12:4-11.

In verse 4, the author said that things could be more intense. What persecution had they not yet experienced? From 10:32-34, what persecution had they experienced? (12:4)

Verses 5-6 contain another quote from the Old Testament. I must admit, I didn't recognize the source of this quote. Where is this quote from? See Proverbs 3:11-12. What is the message of this exhortation? The passage is quoted word for word from the LXX except that the LXX has "son" instead of "my son". There are some differences from the original Hebrew but the idea is unchanged. (12:5-6)

In verse 7, how should the hearers/readers of the letter view their difficult circumstances? (12:7)

In verse 8, why should the recipients of the letter be encouraged by what they are experiencing? (12:8)

Verse 9 contains another comparison and contrast. I'm sure that there were exceptions to the statement of the first part of the verse back then just as there are today. It was a general statement. What is the point of verse 9? "Father of spirits" is in contrast to "fathers of the flesh" (ESV "earthly fathers"). (12:9)

Verse 10 continues the contrast and comparison of verse 9. How was the discipline of earthly fathers described? What does God's discipline produce? (12:10)

The first part of verse 11 contains a common experience. Discipline is painful and not enjoyable. If a parent disciplines their child and the child enjoys it, is that true discipline? What does God's discipline yield? (12:11)

Can God's discipline inform the way Christian parents discipline their children? Many of us, if not all, were sent to our rooms by our parents as a punishment. Now, if a parent sends their child to their room where their computer, phone and gaming devices are, is that discipline? Is it loving parenting if a parent lets their child determine what they eat, when they go to bed and what their gender is?