

The Book of Hebrews

מֵאֲנִישׁ מִנֶּגֶד דָּא מִן תְּאֵקְלָא
צִמְאָלִיל נִתְּאֵתְצֵרַח דְּרִתְסֵנִי סָק
אֵת פִּקְלָא תְּסֵנִי סִרְבָּאֵל
רֵךְ תֵּא סֵךְ תֵּאקְסֵנִי דְּמִמֵּצ
תֵּאֲתַפְלֵשׁ נִתְּרִדְנֵהֶרְפֵּר נִרְלֵךְ
תֵּאֲגֵשׁ רֵלֵךְ מִלְלֵצ סֵס תֵּלֵשׁ



Outline of Hebrews

“Jesus is Better”

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Outline of Hebrews

V. Concluding Exhortations and Warnings (10:19-12:29)

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 - 1. Don't Abandon Confidence but Persevere in Faith (10:32-39)
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Outline of Hebrews

2. The “Hall of Faith” – Description and Examples of Persevering Faith (11:1-12:3)
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 - f. Run the Race Looking to Jesus as the Supreme Example of Faith (12:1-3)

Run the Race Looking to Jesus as the Supreme Example of Faith (12:1-3)

¹ *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. ³ Consider him who endured from sinners such hostility against himself, so that you may not grow weary or fainthearted.*

¹ ***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...***

- The writer of Hebrews begins chapter 12 with the familiar race metaphor, challenging his readers to ***endure*** in their commitment to Christ ***as a runner*** would endure in a marathon.
- The author makes a logical transition between chapters 11 and 12 with the opening word, “*therefore*” and the phrase, “*so great a cloud of witnesses*” – which is a reference to the examples of faith just given in chapter 11.
- He turns the spotlight on himself ***and*** his readers by using the first person plural “*we*” as he challenges them to recognize themselves as part of the great host believers called to live by faith.

¹ *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...*

- The **basis** for this exhortation has been laid well with the example list given in chapter 11.
- Authors of ancient classical literature used the image of a “*cloud*” to describe a large group of people, and our writer uses this metaphor with an added **emphasis**, pointing back to the multitude of persons listed or alluded to in chapter 11 as “*so great a cloud of witnesses*.”
- In what sense are the author and his readers “*surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses*”?

¹ *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...*

- Some, in light of the “*race*” imagery, have understood this statement to mean that the countless thousands of God’s faithful throughout the ages now sit in the “stands” of eternity, observing Christians as they seek to live for Christ in the world.
- The Greek word translated “*witnesses*” here **can** carry the meaning “spectator or observer,” as in 1 Timothy 6:12:
 - *...you made the good confession in the presence of many **witnesses**.*
- And furthermore, the word “*surrounded*” **could** bring to mind the ancient amphitheater with its tiered rows of seats – where spectators would sit watching the events.

Ancient Greek Amphitheater



¹ *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...*

- Nevertheless, it would seem that the author intends more from this image than to merely present the faithful believers of the ages as passive spectators.
- More than likely the author intends for us to understand that they are “*witnesses*” (Greek: *marturos*) in the sense that they “bear witness” to the Christian community of God’s faithfulness and of the effectiveness of faith.

¹ *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...*

- So, God has **borne witness** to the faithfulness of these OT believers to him (“*commended*” in Heb 11:2,39 is from a related word), and they, in turn, **bear witness** to the faithfulness of God to them for succeeding generations.
- In this way, the “*great a cloud*” of faithful Christ-followers through history offer the readers motivation in their current struggle to stay the course in their Christian commitment.
- Or, as F. F. Bruce puts it, “*It is not so much **they** who look at **us** as **we** who look to **them** – for encouragement.*”

¹ *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...*

- The author uses **a number of athletic images** drawn from the ancient Greek games (776 BC – AD 393), precursors of our modern Olympics (which began in 1896).
- For example, the author previously described Jesus as our “*forerunner*” (Heb 6:20).
- Here, in verse 1, he calls his hearers to strip off every encumbering “*weight*” and run the “*race*” on the course set out before them.
- He will later refer to being “*trained*” by discipline (Heb 12:11) and will apply the metaphor of runners’ injuries to spiritual disabilities (Heb 12:12-13).
- In the imagery found here in verse 1, the “*weight*” to be stripped away could either be **training weights** or **encumbering clothing**.

¹ *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...*

- Perhaps **clothing** is in view here, since the word translated “*lay aside*” elsewhere in the New Testament refers to the **removal of clothing** (Rom 13:12; Eph 4:22; Col 3:8), and the word “*trained*” in Heb 12:11 alludes to the Greek athletic practice of competing **unclothed**.
- The weight to be discarded symbolizes “*sin which clings so closely*” or “*the sin which so easily entangles us*” (NAS)
- The sin to which the original readers were **especially** tempted was **apostatizing** from their allegiance to Christ under the threat of persecution (Heb 10:26-39).
- Their “*struggle against sin*,” which had not yet escalated to the point of bloodshed, was a struggle to hold fast to their Christian **faith** (Heb 12:4).

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.

- In the **previous** verse, the author began by telling his readers they must “**run with endurance**”, which is another way of saying they must **persevere** in their Christian faith **to the end**.
- The author then tells them **how** to “**run with endurance**”:
 - They must “**lay aside**” every hinderance to running well, “**especially the sin that so easily trips us up**” (NLT).
 - And **here** he tells them that the way to run with endurance is by “**looking to Jesus**.”
- Jesus is the **supreme example** of faith, and believers will be motivated to persevere if they **focus on him** and then, by implication, **follow** his example.

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.

- Jesus is described as “*the founder and perfecter of our faith*.”
- We first saw the word “*founder*” when the author used it in Heb 2:10. There we saw that it means something like “*champion and pioneer*”.
- He’s not *just* a pioneer, though he does go first.
- And he is not a champion in the sense that we don’t have to do *anything*.
- He is a champion who opens the way for us to follow.
- Such an interpretation fits the context here, where Jesus is set forth as the supreme example.

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.*

- Calling Jesus both a “*the founder and perfecter of our faith*” would **seem** to suggest that he initiates and completes the faith of **believers**.
- And indeed, our faith is initiated and sustained by Jesus because he has prayed to the Father that we may come to faith (Jn 17:20ff) and that our faith may not fail (Lk 22:31ff) and we have the assurance that “*he who began a good work in [us] will bring it to completion*” (Phil 1:6)
- But nevertheless, the incarnate Son is **himself** the man of faith **par excellence**, and **this** seems to be the **primary** sense intended by the original Greek here which reads literally, “*the founder and perfecter of faith*” (the word “*our*” is not in the original).

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.

- Jesus, in his unique and solitary struggle, had a goal on which his attention was inflexibly fixed, namely “**the joy that was set before him**”.
- Jesus’ “**joy**” was to complete the work of reconciliation he had come to perform for our eternal benefit and for the glory of his Father’s name (cf. Jn 12:28), thereby bringing to completion all of God’s purposes for creation and for his elect people.
- Jesus’ “**joy**” is the joy of heaven over every sinner who repents and returns to the Father’s home, over every lost sheep that is found, over every son that was dead and is alive again (Lk 15:6ff, 24, 32)

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.

- It was “**for**”, that is “*for the sake of*” (NEB), this joy that Jesus “*endured the cross.*”
- Which confirms that, in our author’s mind, the death of Christ on the cross was **the central purpose** of his coming to earth – **Calvary** was the reason for Bethlehem!
- The road to the “*joy*” ahead was the way of the “*cross*”.
- The incarnate Son, accordingly, set his face to go to Jerusalem, knowing full well this meant arrest, false accusation, unjust condemnation, and the extremes of suffering and death, but also thereafter resurrection, exaltation, and “*joy*” (Mk 8:31; 9:12, 31; 10:33ff; Lk 9:22, 44; 17:25; 18:31ff)

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.**

- Jesus' determination to endure the cross meant "*despising the shame,*" since nothing more disgraceful could happen to any man than to suffer public crucifixion, a fate designed for the basest of criminals and the lowest of social outcasts.
- It was a punishment so degrading, that no Roman citizen was allowed to be subjected to it.
- But for **Jesus**, the cross was the gateway to "**joy**", his joy and ours; for Jesus who "*endured the cross, despising the shame*" is now "*seated at the right hand of the throne of God.*"

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**.

- Here the author picks up again one of the **central themes** of this letter – Jesus’ fulfillment of Psalm 110.
- The prophecy of Ps 110:1 is fulfilled in Jesus being “**seated at the right hand of the throne of God**” and reigning over all (cf. Heb 1:3, 13; 8:1; 10:12-13).
- Just as **Moses** renounced the temporary pleasures of sin for the sake of reward that lay before **him** (Heb 11:24-26), so too **Jesus** endured the cross for the **reward**.
- The application to the readers is clear.
- They too must endure to the end, being willing to endure any suffering since they know they will **ultimately** enjoy a **great reward**.

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

- The author continues to elaborate on Jesus' role as an example.
- The readers must run the race to the end by looking at Jesus who endured the cross.
- The readers are urged to consider Jesus, and again his **endurance** is emphasized, which is what the readers are in need of right now.
- Jesus "*endured*" remarkable "*hostility*" of sinners "*against himself*."
- No doubt, the author alludes here to a similar hostility which the readers experienced, so he calls upon them to consider the example of Jesus who was not exempt from the same opposition by "*sinner*s."

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

- The author is concerned the readers will “*grow weary or fainthearted*” and give up.
- By considering what Jesus suffered on their behalf, the author hopes that they will come away with fresh resolve in a world that remains unfriendly and opposed to their Christian faith and **not** give up.
- Giving up is another way of describing **apostasy**.
- Giving up is the **opposite** of enduring to the end.
- Jesus endured by keeping his eyes on the ultimate reward, and we should do the same.

A Brief Summary of the Message of Today's Text Applied to Us (12:1-3)

- We as believers are in a “race”, which is long and difficult, and they must ***finish*** the race in order to receive the prize.
- But we are ***not alone*** in the race.
- Many (“*so great a cloud of witnesses*” – see chapter 11) have run this race before us and bear witness to the value of doing so.
- We must throw off ***everything*** off that hinders us from running and finishing the race.

A Brief Summary of the Message of Today's Text (12:1-3)

- Jesus is our supreme example, for he endured to the end of his race, suffering agony and opposition of those who hated him.
- But he was ***rewarded*** for his obedience and endurance, for he now reigns at the right hand of God.
- So too, we must be willing to suffer ***with*** Jesus and ***for*** him.
- Jesus is the ***source*** of our faith, but at the same time we should continue to believe and keep our eyes on Jesus as the ***ultimate example***.
- The race won't last forever, and knowing there is a great reward ahead should motivate us to keep running.

Class Discussion Time



*Class Discussion Time

- Figurative language in a text is meant to stimulate the imagination, inviting a reader to enter into the image and connect with the relevant material the image has to offer.
- Today we saw the author make extensive use of the image of running a race as a way of faithfully living the Christian life.
- The key to dealing with such images is to discern the connecting point between the image and the topic at hand.
- There are many ways, for example, in which the author of Hebrews does **not** intend the race imagery to be read. For example:
 - The author certainly does **not** play up the idea of **competition**, as in “God wants you to beat the other guy.”
 - Nor does he mean to emphasize here that God gives Christians the ability to overcome **all** obstacles.
 - There is no hint of “the race belongs to the strong,” or “pace yourself and you will get farther!”
- Therefore, we need to exercise restraint in the use of this image.

*Class Discussion Time

- Nevertheless, as *I* see it, the race image provides ***at least*** three primary concepts that overlap with the Christian life.
- How many would ***you*** say there are? Name them.
 - Some things in life must be rejected if we are to run effectively.
 - The Christian life, like a long-distance run, is difficult and, therefore, takes sustained effort.
 - If we are to live for God in a faithful manner, a healthy view of Christ and a relationship with him are paramount.

*Class Discussion Time

- We saw in today's text that we must "*lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely*", that is we must throw off every sin that might easily trip us up in our pursuit of the Christian faith.
- The sin to which the original hearers were especially tempted was apostatizing from their allegiance to Christ due to societal pressures and the threat of persecution and returning to their former Judaism (Heb 10:26-39).
- What are some common sinful patterns of thinking and/or living that you believe might pose a similar threat in our day?