

THE FIFTH WARNING (Hebrews 12:14-29)

By G. H. Lang

Part 1: AN EXAMPLE OF A BELIEVER WHO FORFEITED HIS BIRTHRIGHT (Heb. 12:14-17)

1. The Christian Course (ver. 14).

i. *Its Principle—Peace* (ver. 14). By the word *diokete*, follow on, pursue eagerly, the picture of the race is resumed from ver. 1. It is the word used twice by Paul in Phil. 3:12-14: “I *press on* . . . I *press on* toward the goal unto the prize.” Paul had in view the final end, the prize; our Writer has regard to an immediate object necessary to reaching that final object, even the leading a life of peace with all men. The believer is to be as zealous in walking in peace as the racer is to secure the crown. In a world marked by greed and contention this is indeed a strenuous affair. It will not be obtained haphazard, but only by such as pursue it as an all-worthy, all-desirable object, and who make every sacrifice to secure it.

In the eighteenth century an American, John Woolman the Quaker, saw clearly and truly that the principle of acquiring and retaining is a basic and inevitable source of strife. The pursuit of wealth (vast or small) will always bring contention the pursuit of peace alone will change this.

When a certain village refused to grant hospitality to the Son of God two disciples proposed righteous and summary vengeance: “But He turned and rebuked them. And they went to another village” (Luke 9:51-56). They had not learned His earlier lesson: “Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called sons of God” (Matt. 5:8). The very God of peace sent into this warring world the Prince of peace, Who made peace by the blood of His cross, peace between God and man, and man and man; therefore to us who know this the exhortation is: “If it be possible, as much as in you lieth, be at peace with all men” (Rom. 12:18). If there is to be contention, see to it that it arises wholly from the other party.

The effect on personal character of this one habit and practice is immeasurable. The immediate result is an ever-increasing moral likeness to the Prince of peace; the son of God becomes more and more like the Son of God; which has intimate bearing upon that final goal when the son is to share the glory of the Son.

For by the very grammar of this passage this pursuit of peace is linked indivisibly with the development of that “holiness without which no one shall see the Lord”—it is all one pursuit, one present object. It is obvious that one who is selfish and contentious cannot be holy, for the Holy One is the God of love and peace. To promote peace God made the supreme sacrifice of his well-beloved Son and the Son of God of his life. To be holy like God involves of necessity that the child of God must “seek peace and

pursue it" (1 Pet. 3:11; Psa. 34:14) at whatever personal sacrifice.

ii. *The Character of the Christian Course, Holiness* (ver. 14). The A.V. "holiness" is too indefinite. The Writer used the definite article—"the holiness." This is not a usual English expression, and the R.V. gives "the sanctification." The force of the word *hagiasmos* can be learned from its New Testament use.

(1) Rom. 6:19: "For as ye presented your members slaves to uncleanness and to lawlessness unto lawlessness, thus now present your members slaves to the righteousness unto *sanctification*." "The righteousness," that is, that practical righteousness just before mentioned (ver. 13), which is wrought out in our bodies by them being dedicated to God as His weapons in the battle against sin. Having by grace been made free from sin we have become slaves to this righteousness. In ver. 22 this *sanctification* is described as a "fruit" of that dedication to God, which shows that it is not the root, justification, but a living growth from the root; and the end of this process is "life eternal," in full development.

(2) 1 Cor. 1:30; "Christ Jesus became unto us wisdom from God, even (*te kai*) righteousness, *sanctification* and redemption." Righteousness as to standing in law before God, sanctification as the power of a holy life now, and redemption as to the perfecting of the work of salvation at His coming. Here sanctification is the connecting process between justification and perfection, and is thus distinguished from both. Comp. Eph. 5:25-27.

(3) This practical application of the word is shown with emphasis in 1 Thess. 4:3, 4, 7 where it refers to sexual purity.

(4) In 2 Thess. 2:13 a yet deeper practical work is in view in the expression "*sanctification of spirit*," that deeper inner realm which prompts and controls the dedicated body by the energy of the Holy Spirit.

(5) In 1 Tim. 2:15 habitual *sanctification* is connected with faith, love, and sobriety in a woman as conducive to safety in childbirth.

(6) 1 Pet. 1:1, 2 shows that the choice God made according to His foreknowledge operates "in sanctification of spirit" (*en hagiasmos pneumatos*, as 2 Thess. 2:13); that is, God's choice takes effect in the realm of man's spirit as sanctified by the energy of the Holy Spirit, which leads to obedience and consecration to God through the blood of Jesus Christ.

These are all the occurrences of this word and they emphasize that it points to practical holiness, which the believer is to consider altogether desirable and therefore to cultivate with diligence, to pursue it as more to be desired than fine gold.

That the holiness here in view is not that righteousness which is imputed to the ungodly when he first places faith in Christ is clear from the very fact that the already justified are here exhorted to pursue it. That they had received as a free gift (Rom. 3:24); *this* they are to pursue.

iii. *The Goal of the Race—Seeing the Lord* (ver. 14). Two questions arise: (1) Who is “the Lord”? and (2) What is meant by “seeing” Him?

(1) Concerning the Lord Jesus Christ it is written that before Him “every knee shall bow” (Rom. 14:11; Phil. 2:10, 11) and that “every eye shall see Him,” including those who pierced Him (Rev. 1:7). Therefore holiness is no prerequisite for seeing Christ.

But the title “the Lord” is definitely applied to God the Father. This usage follows the Old Testament. In Ps. 2:2 “the Lord [Jehovah]” is distinguished from “His Anointed,” which passage is quoted in Acts 4:26, followed in vers. 29, 30 by “And now Lord... grant... that signs and wonders may be done through the name of Thy holy Servant Jesus.” The same distinction is made in Paul’s words: “the grace of our Lord abounded exceedingly with faith and love which is in Christ Jesus” (1 Tim. 1:14). Christ Himself had addressed His Father as “Lord of heaven and earth” (Matt. 11:25); and James echoes this by speaking of “the Lord and Father” (Jas. 3:9).

It would therefore seem that in our passage it must be the Father for the sight of Whom practical holiness is essential.

(2) As to the sense of the word “see,” here again the Old Testament will show what is meant.

(a) Gen. 32:30. The “man” Who wrestled with Jacob was so actual and visible that Jacob said of Him, “I have seen God face to face,” and therefore he named the place Peniel, which means “The face of God.”

(b) Exod. 24:9-11. Moses, Aaron, and seventy-two others, were called by God to go up into Mount Sinai, where “they saw the God of Israel... they beheld God.”

(c) Exod. 33:22, 23. To Moses God said: “I will put thee in a cleft of the rock . . . and thou shalt see My back; but My face shall not be seen.”

(d) Judges 13:22. After open intercourse with an angel “Manoali said unto his wife, We shall surely die, because we have seen God.”

(e) 1Kings 22:19. Micaiah said to Ahab: “I saw Jehovah sitting upon His throne, and all the angels standing by Him.”

(f) Job 19:26, 27. "From my flesh shall I see God: Whom I shall see for myself, and mine eyes shall behold."

(g) Isa. 6:1. "In the year that king Uzziah died I saw Jehovah sitting upon a throne."

In all these places the Septuagint uses the same verb "to see" (*horao*) as in our passage. It means, "to see with eyes." The very noun "eye" (in Greek) is derived from it. So that all these places show that whether it was by bodily sight or ecstatic vision, an actual sight of an actual person is meant by the term "see." In those times the Person it is true was the *Son* of God; but this does not affect the sense of "to see," and

(h) Dan. 7:9 carries the matter further. Daniel said: "I beheld till thrones were placed and One that was ancient of days did sit," Whose appearance the prophet then described. This Ancient of days was the Father, for the Son of man is shortly brought before Him (ver. 13).

Thus to this expression "see God," as to so very much else in this Epistle, there is an Old Testament background, and it creates the notion of a literal sight of a literal Person. The New Testament follows to the same effect.

(i) Matt. 18:10: "in heaven their angels do always behold the face of My Father Who is in heaven."

(j) 1 John 3:2. "We know that, if He shall be manifested, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him even as He is."

(h) Rev. 22:3. And of the final beatific vision in glory it is written: "His servants shall do Him service; and they shall see His face."

Plainly as all these statements point to a face-to-face sight of God, either of the Son or the Father, there is yet another statement even more completely parallel to our present passage. It is

(l) Matt. 5:8: "Blessed are the pure in heart; for they shall see God"; and, as in *Hebrews*, this is immediately associated with peaceableness by the directly following words: "Blessed are the peacemakers; for they shall be called sons of God." The mention of *sons* of God shows that "God" here is the Father, and thus the Son pointed forward to a sight of the Father.

(m) This is the evident sense of the sublime doxology in Jude 24, 25: "Now unto Him that is able to guard you from stumbling, and to set you before the presence of His glory without blemish in exceeding joy, to the only God our Saviour, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, etc." "God our Saviour" must here mean the Father, for the glory is rendered to Him "through Jesus Christ our Lord"; and the prospect opened is of

a permanent position (“set” you) before the very personal glory of God.

It is essential to this that there be conferred a body of glory, spiritual and of heaven, which can endure the blaze of that uncreated light. The natural, earthly body cannot do this: “Man shall not see Me and live” (Exod. 33:20) for “the blessed and only Potentate,” the Father, is “dwelling in light unapproachable; Whom no man hath seen, nor is able to see” (1 Tim. 6:15, 16). The heirs of glory must be “clothed upon with our habitation which is from heaven” (2 Cor. 5:2), at the coming of the Lord (1 Cor. 15:35-38).

iv. *The Prize of the Course is Conditional* (ver. 14).

The prospect thus opened to faith is of inconceivable sublimity. No higher dignity will ever be possible. God has exhausted His resources for displaying grace, for He proposes to bring His sons to His own presence, to share the love, standing, and glory which He has granted to His own beloved Son. More than this He can never design or do, for He cannot place anyone *above* His Son. Therefore could Paul say of this secret counsel of God that it “completed the word [message] of God”, brought it to full development (Col. 1:24-26: *Variorum Bible*).

But the attaining of this high dignity is conditional upon development of godliness. “Pursue the sanctification apart from which [*hou chtoris*] no one shall see the Lord.” The first privilege which God in His grace confers is a standing in law as justified before Him as Judge; the final privilege which that grace will grant is a standing in person before His presence as the Father of glory. Both of these privileges are conditional. The former is conditional upon the guilty sorrowing over his sins and humbling himself to accept the pardon of His offended Sovereign on the sole ground of the meritorious sacrifice of the Redeemer. The latter is conditional upon the justified giving diligence to advance in personal holiness.

The pathway from starting point to goal may be long and dangerous, but God is able to guard from stumbling till the goal be reached (Jude 24). And God *will* guard all who on their part “add all diligence” in developing, by the Spirit of Christ, the character of Christ. “Wherefore, brethren, give the more diligence to make your calling and election sure: for, *if ye do* these things ye shall *never stumble*; for *thus* shall be *richly* supplied unto you the entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ” (2 Pet. 1:1-11). God does *not* say to the *ungodly* “*If ye do* these things” you shall be justified; but He *does* say to the *justified* “*If ye do* these things” ye shall never stumble, and *thus* your entrance into the kingdom shall be noble, in place of being humble.

Mr. Carnality and Mr. Faint-heart would fain take comfort from Jude’s assurance that God is able to guard from stumbling and set us before the presence of His glory; but they wish to forget the state necessary for that august Presence, even the being “without blemish.” Or they fondly suppose that God will produce in them that

unblemished and unblameable state without diligence on their part. They will be bitterly disappointed at last. It were wise for such to learn from present experience. If a child of God ceases to give diligence to walk in holiness he loses that present enjoyment of the invisible presence of God which is the joy and strength of the godly. How shall one unfit for that Presence now be found fit for its visible glory where nothing that is unclean shall in anywise enter? (Rev. 21:27). Let such therefore “wash their robes” betimes (Rev. 22:14).

Indeed, it is the wisdom of each aspirant for that glory to ponder the Lord’s words quoted above from Matt. 5:8: “Blessed are the *pure in heart*, for they shall see God.” “A pure heart is one to which all that is not of God is strange and jarring” (Tauler). How terribly easy it is to indulge in the heart feelings, cravings, purposes unknown to the heart of God, strange and jarring to Him. Yet He can cleanse the heart from these if there be faith on our part, as He did the hearts of the heathen gathered in the house of Cornelius (Acts 15:9) Let us therefore, with a defiled believer of old, cry “Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me” (Ps. 51:10). For we maybe well assured that outward correctness will not by itself suffice for Him Who searcheth the heart, Who is, as Peter described Him, “the heart-knowing God” (Acts 15:8). A clean life must grow from a pure heart, or it will be but a plant without root, doomed to wither quickly.

One clear day an unbeliever was seen searching the sky with a telescope. Asked what he was doing he answered: I am trying to find your God, but I cannot see Him anywhere! The fitting reply was given: And you never will, for it is written, “Blessed are the pure in heart, for *they* shall see God.” Most true, now and for ever! A king has millions of subjects, most of whom never see him in his palace. It is the few who are counted worthy of this honour. “Many are called, few chosen”; “many shall be last that are first [in opportunity and outward standing]; and first that are last” (Matt. 19:27-20:16).

2. Three Perils (vers. 15-17).

There are three ever-present perils against which the heir of glory must have an ever-open eye. Even as the *episkopos*, the elder of a church, must maintain the keen watch of the shepherd (*episkopountes*) over the welfare of the sheep (1 Pet. 5:1, 2), so must each Christian be ever “looking carefully” (*episkopountes*) against these dangers, lest as wolves they devastate the life.

i. *Falling short of the grace of God* (ver. 15). In ch. 4:1 this term *hustereo* means *to fail to attain* a given privilege, the rest of God. In Rom. 3:23 it means *to fail to live up to* a standard, the glory of God. 1 Cor. 1:7 states that the Corinthian believers did not *lack* any of the gifts available in Christ. Our present passage may be compared with Gal. 5:4: “Ye are brought to nought from Christ, ye who would be justified by law; ye are fallen *out of grace*” (*ek-pipto*). You have ceased to be in the realm where grace reigns. Our Writer does not go so far as this, but speaks only of “falling short from (*apo*) the

grace of God,” of not attaining to and enjoying all that grace makes possible. How many a Christian life is sadly *deficient* of this or that heavenly quality necessary fully to glorify God and to acquire His highest gifts.

It is the personal servant (“his own servants,” Matt. 25:14), who lacks the zeal and devotion to use the pound entrusted to him while his Lord is away, of whom it is said that, at the Lord’s return, he must hear the solemn sentence: “Take away from him the pound . . . from him that hath not, even that which he hath shall be taken away from him.” This unfaithful servant is not killed as are the enemies of his Lord, but he pays a severe price for having fallen short of the grace of God. He did not appreciate grace in his Lord and therefore lacked it in himself (Luke 19:24, 26, 27, 21).

ii. *Bitterness* (ver. 15). A feeling in the heart is like a root in the ground; it must either wither and die, or be dug out, or else it will spring up. There is no such thing in this present life as the removing from the believer of the evil soil, the carnal nature, in which evil roots grow; but the roots themselves can be eradicated by watchful and strenuous care, in the power of the Spirit of holiness.

If the heart be flooded with the love of God (Rom. 5:5), if by obedience the disciple abides in the continual enjoyment of the love of Christ (John 15:9, 10), then love will kill bitterness, and the Christian will fulfil the exhortation “Let *all* bitterness “with its evil fruit of wrath, anger, clamor, railing, and malice, “be put away from you” (Eph. 4:31). Thus the root will not spring up, nor its evil fruit mentioned cause the many [equals, the majority] to be defiled.

But if the child of God, by selfishness and carelessness, allows bitter feelings against another to poison his heart, so that others become involved and defiled, then he is not developing that sanctification without which no one shall see the Lord.

iii. *Sinful indulgence of the body is the third peril* (ver. 16). Of this two instances are mentioned: (1) sexual sin, fornication; and (2) evil indulgence in eating. Perhaps man’s deadliest snares are not acts wrong in themselves, as blasphemy or murder, but right acts done wrongly, as these here in view.

(1) For sexual intercourse is an ordinance of God for mankind, but its illicit indulgence is a crime of first magnitude, of which it is written plainly, and to Christians, that “the Lord is an avenger in all these things, as also we forewarned you and testified” (1 Thess. 4:1-8); that is, God Himself sees to the execution of the penalty.

This vice is universal still, as it was when Paul was writing. The craving of the individual is aggravated by the ease of indulgence, and the general consent dulls the conscience. In Christ the child of God is elevated to a purer moral region and is given moral power by which to escape “from the corruption that is in the world by lust” (2 Pet. 1:3, 4); but let him watch and pray, lest he enter into temptation, for the higher the standing the deeper the fall; and a brother in the family of God in Corinth had fallen

lower than even the debased heathen would tolerate (1 Cor. 5:1).

This vileness was an aggravation of the sin of Reuben. He indulged once with his father's concubine (Gen. 35:22); this Corinthian Christian was living habitually with his father's wife. And the atmosphere was infectious; there was the deadly danger of the whole church becoming leavened (1 Cor. 5:2, 6). Reuben paid the severe penalty that he lost his priority, his dignities as the firstborn in the family (Gen. 49:3, 4); this Corinthian was in imminent danger of losing his life by judicial action of Satan, though secure of his salvation in the day of the Lord Jesus (1 Cor. 5:3-5). It appears that he repented promptly and the sentence was cancelled (2 Cor. 2: 5-11).

The most cogent argument on this urgent topic is in 1 Cor. 6:12-20. Its conclusion is that we should "Flee fornication" and glorify God in our body (vers. 18, 20).

(2) Profanity (vers. 16, 17). The profanity of Esau's mind was shown in that he esteemed a passing gratification of the palate above noble permanent privileges ordained of God. He "despised his birthright" (Gen. 25:34). It is a vigorous word here used, the one which describes the contempt with which carnal men treated the Son of man: "He was despised and rejected" (Isa. 53:3), "a reproach of men and despised of the people" (Ps. 22:6). The Septuagint gives a word (*phaulizo*) which means that Esau regarded the birthright as paltry, a mere trifle, and so he sold it, he bartered it away for a trifle.

The word *apodidimi* "sold," in the middle voice here used, implies that the article sold is *one's own*, a material point to observe. It shows that Esau was not a mere pretender to the birthright, nor self-deceived on the matter. He was Isaac's legitimate elder son and therefore the birthright was his by law of primogeniture. Therefore he cannot be taken here as a type of a mere professor of Christianity, or one self-deceived as to relationship to Christ. Such a one cannot be warned not to lose or sell a birthright to which he has no title whatever. Esau can be here only a type of a real child of God, one who is the true holder of the birthright. He did not have to acquire this dignity, for the title to it was his by birth; but he did need to value it and retain it, and because he did neither he forfeited it.

"Birthright" is a plural term in both Gen. 25:31, 34 (in the LXX) and in our passage, *ta prototokia*. It should be rendered "the rights of the firstborn," for these were three.

(a) *The* firstborn son was ruler of the household under and for the father. Thus David's elder brother "commanded" his younger brother to attend the family sacrifice at Bethlehem, which fact David and Jonathan considered should be adequate reason for absence from the table of even the king (1 Sam. 20:29).

(b) *This* shows also that the eldest son acted as the family priest, for he is shown acting as chief on occasion of a family sacrifice.

(c) *By the law of God the firstborn received a double share of the father's estate (Dent. 21:17); that is, if there were six heirs, the patrimony was divided into seven portions of which the firstborn took two.*

No alien, no bastard, no pretender had any rights here; and so the legitimate sons of Gilead drove out of the house Jephthah, because he was the son of a harlot, saying, "Thou shalt not inherit in our father's house; for thou art the son of another woman" (Judges 11:1,2).

God keeps a full register of all His universal family (Luke 10:20; Rev. 13:8; etc.), and therein some are entered as being "firstborn." The reference is probably to the registers kept at the temple in Jerusalem. Who in a numerous family was the firstborn son could be settled beyond controversy, for each such had to be presented to God in the temple (Exod. 13:2, 11; Luke 2: 21-24). God has the names of His firstborn sons duly recorded as such in His register in heaven.

The three above-mentioned rights typify most accurately the triple dignities of the firstborn sons of God who are being brought unto His glory. For they are to rule the universe as kings; to serve as priests, mediating the merits of Christ's redemption and so aiding the intercourse of man with God; and theirs is the rich heavenly portion, instead of only earthly blessedness. The title to these privileges they do not have to acquire; they hold it, for it is a gift that the grace of God has attached to their calling; even as the sons of Abraham did not have to acquire a title to Canaan. But we, as they of old, do have to value these privileges and so walk and so fight as to get possession and keep it, and as they lost their birthright, so may we forfeit ours.

Of this royal dignity, the "crown" is the symbol: therefore the warning: "hold fast that which thou hast, that no one take thy crown" (Rev. 3:11), as Jacob took the birthright that Esau despised.

Other Old Testament passages make clear that the birthright was forfeitable. I Chron. 26:10 mentions that of a certain family of Levites Shimri was the chief ("for though he was not the firstborn, yet his father made him chief"). This shows that the essential idea of being "firstborn" is priority of rank, not accident of birth; which is the force of Col. 1:15 that Christ is "the firstborn of all creation," not meaning that He was the first to be born and so had a beginning, but that He owns and rules the whole universe by the appointment of His Father (see Heb. 1:2).

1 Chron. 5:1, 2 (and see Gen. 49:3, 4) applies this forfeitableness of the birthright to Reuben, "forasmuch as he defiled his father's couch." The ruler's staff went to his brother Judah, "of him came the prince" (Gen. 49:10); the priesthood went to Levi; and the double inheritance was given to Joseph, whose sons Ephraim and Manasseh each became a tribe in Israel. Here also the one who was the first to be born did not become the firstborn as to rank, for Jacob "set Ephraim before Manasseh" (Gen. 48:8-20).

Thus from the case of Esau the Writer again warns his brethren, partakers of a heavenly calling (ch. 3:1), that the noblest gifts offered in Christ may be missed, yea, *will* be missed if things earthly and present be valued more than things heavenly and future, if the body be gratified at the expense of the spirit.

This last was the sin of our first mother Eve; she forfeited fellowship with God by a false gratifying of the body, by eating wrongly. The spirit succumbed, the body dominated, and thus it has been with all her children. From this slavery to the body God sets us free by redemption and regeneration. It is for each believer to imitate Paul: I buffet my body, and enslave it (*doulag6ga*); lest by any means, after that I as a herald have called others into the race, I myself should be disapproved and refused the crown (1 Cor. 9:27).

(3) The *Loss is Irrecoverable* (ver. 17). The case of Esau shows, indeed, that the sin, which involves so serious loss, is not casual or unintentional, but deliberate. When Jacob proposed the cunning bargain Esau turned it over in his mind, briefly but sufficiently: "Behold, I am about to die: and what profit shall the birthright do to me?" The compact was made the more conscious and deliberate by Jacob demanding that it be confirmed by oath (Gen. 25:31, 33). Thus Esau did not lose his rights by accident or mistake but by compact; with his eyes wide open to what he was doing he *sold* the birthright.

This greatly aggravated his guilt and rendered the position irreversible in two major elements.

First, Esau never after really changed his mind or was sorrowful for his willful sin in this matter. Gen. 27:34, 36 shows him blaming Jacob, not reproaching himself. He mourned his loss but not his sin. In this also he proved himself a true son of his first parents, for Eve and Adam each blamed another for their guilty conduct. In each of the three cases there was a measure of truth, for those others blamed were in part responsible; but godly sorrow for sin seeks no such shelter, but accepts its own responsibility and is humble. This change of mind Esau neither showed nor sought.

Secondly. Esau's act had been ratified by God, and Isaac as a prophet was moved to give to Jacob the blessing that attached to the rights of the firstborn, and his God-inspired prophetic utterance could not be recalled. Esau's cupidity sought the blessing that, by his own act and deed, was no longer rightly his, but his bitter tears could not avail to change Isaac's mind: "he found no place for a change of mind in his father" (*American Standard Version*).

It was Kadesh Barnea enacted in advance in a single individual. When Israel stubbornly refused to accept the privilege available God withdrew the possibility of gaining it. How urgently does Esau bring home to each as an individual the earnest exhortations of ch. 3:12 that we must each "Take heed" that there be no "falling away from the living God," and that of 4:1, "Let us fear lest haply . . . any one of you should

seem to have come short.”

The forfeitability of the birthright is further indicated and emphasized in the case of Reuben. Being Jacob’s eldest son this honour was his; but because of his yielding to an unnatural sensual craving, it was taken from him (1 Chron. 5:1), and was given, as to the territory, to the sons of Joseph, the latter thus, in his children, receiving the double portion; and as to sovereignty, to the tribe of Judah, in the person of David and his sons, including Messiah; and as to the priesthood, to Levi. Was this in the Writer’s mind when he specified in our passage the sin of fornication?

Yet Reuben remained of the family, and was blessed in measure; but as showing that the rights in question if once lost cannot be regained, it is to be remembered that in the days of the future kingdom the status created by Reuben’s misconduct will still abide: the King will be of the house of Judah, the priesthood in Israel will be in the family of Zadok the Levite (Ezek. 48: ii), and Ephraim and Manasseh will hold their double portion. These things Reuben lost for ever, though for ever remaining of the house of Israel, and sharing a portion, though this of ordinary and not special degree. All this is seen by comparing the final and prophetic announcements of Jacob (Gen. 49: 1—4) and Moses (Deut. 33: 6); for Jacob declared that the dignity of the firstborn with its pre-eminence and power belonged to Reuben, yet should not be his, not even in the latter days; yet Moses guaranteed *life* to the tribe, but nothing more: “Let Reuben live, and not die; yet let his men be few.”

[*Note.* Mal. 1:2-5 does not deny that in Heb. 12 Esau is a type of a child of God to-day, but rather establishes it. For Esau is there called “Jacob’s brother.” as in full fact he was. Now in Heb. 11:9, 21 Jacob is cited as a man of faith, a sample of all such, and therefore as a child of God. His “brother” therefore cannot in Malachi typify an unregenerate man or Jacob also must be so, for they are of the same family.

It is also to be stressed that Heb. 11:20 shows, as does the history in Gen. 27:39, 40, that Esau received definite blessings, though inferior to those of the firstborn son. He is therefore not a type of the unregenerate, who are not related to the regenerate, and who are under the curse and wrath of God (Gal. 3:10: John 3:36); but he typifies one who has forfeited priority and privilege, though retaining some measure of blessing.

Thus did the men of war forfeit Canaan and fell in the wilderness, though God in grace treated them as still of the redeemed family and did the best He could for them *in the desert* (Isa. 63:9, 14).

Love in God is not impaired by that weak partiality, which often infects human love, nor is hatred in Him vitiated by that evil bitterness which makes it wicked in man. In God both are harmonious with His holy preference for piety and holy abhorrence of impiety. It is in this sense only that He “loved” Jacob and “hated”

Esau.

It should also be observed that in Malachi it is Esau in his, posterity, Edom, rather than in his own person, on whom because of their wickedness the judgments are inflicted, and to whom God's holy "hatred" is shown.

Of Esau himself the history gives, as the final picture, a man who has risen above his earlier hatred of his brother, welcomes him back with love, is ready to protect him and his substance (Gen. 32 and 33), and who at last joins him at the graveside of their father (Gen. 35:29). Thus is he a type of one of the family of God who lapses into carnality and bitterness, but years after is restored in soul, yet who nevertheless cannot regain the full position and priority originally owned. He is the first that shall be last, though still in the family.

A wealthy commercial magnate of two generations ago had two sons. The elder did not live worthily and the father left him only enough to maintain him decently; but the title, castle, fortune, and business went to the younger son. Yet the elder remained one of the family and received as much as he deserved.

This is the force of Rom. 8:16, 17: "we are children of God: and if children, then heirs; heirs indeed (*men*) of God, but (*de*) joint-heirs with Christ [Messiah, if so be that we suffer with Him that we may be also glorified with Him." For every child, however wayward, inherits something from the Father—His life, nature, love, with food, clothing, training; but sharing with the Firstborn in glory is conditional.

Part 2: THE PRIVILEGES OFFERED AND AT STAKE (12:18-24)

1. SAVED PERSONS IN VIEW.

It is very plain that this portion of God's word has no reference to the unsaved. Months before they reached Sinai, Israel had experienced the redeeming power of the blood of atonement, and were freed from the authority of the destroying angel in Egypt. They had also left Egypt for ever as their sphere of life, and the Red Sea was rolling between them and its scenes of bondage or of pleasure. They were thus a picture of us who have accepted the eternal deliverance from wrath through the precious blood of Christ, and who have thereupon been cut off from the life of heart-association with the world by the power of the love of Him Whose death at the cross at the hands of the world implies our death with Him to that world. This union with Him is set forth in our immersion in the waters of baptism in His name; and Israel crossing the Sea is declared in the New Testament (1 Cor. 10:1) to be an old-time parallel to our baptism.

Thus redeemed, and thus separated to a walk of faith in God, Israel presently drew near to Mount Sinai, there to gain a fuller knowledge of the great Jehovah, the God with Whom they had to do, But how terrible was the aspect in which they were to meet Him! With what dreadful accompaniments did He present Himself! The exhibition was indeed suited to their condition, for their first need was to know that their God was infinitely greater and grander than all the gods of Egypt or the other nations, so that the dread of these latter might be broken from off their hearts.

They stand, then, beneath the mountain, which towers above them some 7,000 feet, and gaze with terror at its cloud-capped, lightning-lit, earthquake-rent summit; and even Moses, the friend of God, says: "I exceedingly fear and quake."

2. The Prospects of the Christian.

But how different is the prospect at which we are called to look. From our present place as pilgrims in a world that affords our hearts naught by which we can profit, we are brought to gaze up to a height of privilege and glory which is as entrancing and encouraging as Sinai seemed to Israel to be forbidding.

"Ye *have* come," says the Scripture: it is a perfect tense that is used. As Israel had come to Sinai, so we "have drawn near" to these higher, because heavenly and eternal, glories. Let us then inspect closely what is spread before and above us. We will observe first the blood-besprinkled ground where Israel stood and where we stand.

i. "Ye have come unto the blood of sprinkling, that speaketh better than that of Abel."

"Abel's blood for vengeance
Pleaded to the skies;
But the blood of Jesus
For our pardon cries."

No matter what is the privilege now known, or hereafter to be gained, all our standing and hope is based upon the atonement of Calvary. Had not the blood of Jesus put away our sin we had been destroyed in Egypt, and had never drawn near to God, nor had any prospect whatever to which to aspire. And if that same blood does not keep us clean, then will continuous communion be impossible; "but if we walk in the light, as God is in the light, we [God and the saint] have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanseth us [keeps us perpetually and wholly clean] from all sin" (1 John 1:7). And to all eternity, and in whatever height of glory we may reign on Mount Zion, we shall know our security to stand in that eternal redemption.

"I stand upon His merit:
I know no other stand,
Not e'en where glory dwelleth
In Immanuel's land."

ii. "Ye have come unto Jesus the mediator of a new covenant." This theme is a chief part of the burden of the Epistle. Hebrew believers, cast out of the synagogue, unwelcome at the temple, deprived therefore of the sacrifices and priesthood, seemed to have lost all that made life great and safe for the Israelite. Gentile believers similarly lost completely their former religious associations, which carried serious consequences in an age when religion interpenetrated all departments of life. To comfort such they are instructed that there are heavenly realities of which Israel's earthly privileges were but shadows. The covenant made at Sinai gives place to the new covenant of which God had spoken through Jeremiah (31:31). This covenant has eternal force, being assured by a sacrifice which has eternal value; it carries promises which are far, far better than any limited to the earth could ever be; and it is guaranteed and administered by a Priest Who is none less than God's Son incarnate and glorified, and whose office does not pass from Himself to another, seeing that He ever liveth in the power of an indissoluble life (Heb. 7:16).

Thus those who have come unto Jesus as the mediator of the new covenant gain heavenly and eternal privileges; and these they receive for the sake of what 1-le is to God, and not out of regard to any merit of their own; even as God wrought for Israel in Egypt not because of ought that He saw in them, but because of His own unmerited love and because of His covenant with their fathers, the heads of their family (Deut. 7:7, 8). Christ is the Head of all the redeemed family of God, the Surety of this better covenant, in which all now share who accept Him as their sacrifice and mediator.

iii. Ye have come unto “the spirits of just men made perfect.” As explained above at chi. 11:40 (p. 228 f.) we understand this to mean that we have come unto a point of privilege entitling us to anticipate a share in the first resurrection of the just, for the just are not yet made perfect, nor can be till resurrection. It is a prospect to which we aspire; just as Israel did not reach the summit of Sinai, but gazed up at it.

iv. Therefore the next honour named is that we have come unto “God the Judge of all.” From the preceding clauses it will be seen that the force of the words “ye have come” is that we have come to *participate* in the privileges stated, and not merely to view them. Even thus it was open to Israel to share in the benefits of the sacrifices offered at Sinai, and in the advantages of the covenant there enacted. Keeping therefore to this sense, and thus interpreting the clauses with uniformity, the present words will not mean that we have drawn near to God to be judged, but rather to share with Him the honour of the office indicated by the title. As the Judge of all we shall not meet God, for Christ Himself declared this in the plain and memorable words, “Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word, and believeth Him that sent me, hath eternal life, and cometh not into judgment, but hath passed out of death into life” (John 5:24). And as regards the appearing of the saints before the judgment seat of Christ (2 Cor. 5:10), this is indeed a solemn prospect to be ceaselessly reckoned upon, but is not the matter here in question. The saints are to judge the world and even angels (1 Cor. 6:2, 3). The apostles are assured of this office in relation to Israel as a nation (Luke 22:28-30). The same thought is suggested by the promise of sitting upon the throne with Christ, the Judge (Rev. 3:21); that is, by the dignity of kingship being conferred, for of old the king was the chief judge of the people; and by such a promise as that to the saints who overcome that they shall rule the nations (Rev. 2:27).

In the administration of His mighty kingdom, and in the adjusting and rewarding of the affairs of the ages of human and angelic history, the glorified saints will be associated with the King in glory. Doubtless a large part of our training on earth is directed by our Father to capacitating us for such responsible and honorable office. If then a self-willed child refuses and nullifies the training, how shall he be found fit for the high but delicate position that he might have gained?

v. Being thus included in the company of the “kings and priests” of the future, we have come unto the “church of the firstborn [ones] who are enrolled in heaven.” The law of primogeniture is Divinely recognized in both the sphere of the family and in that of the nations, and also in the heavenly regions as well as the earthly. This honour is evidently the initial reason for the kingship descending as a rule to the eldest son of a monarch. The honoring of the eldest son is, indeed, founded in nature, and is further enforced by Divine sanction. It is still largely acknowledged in the east, as in the case of a young lawyer in Egypt remarking to the writer, that his eldest brother had just taken off a book, for, said my friend, he thinks that because he is the eldest he can do as he likes with our things.

In this we may see the explanation of Pharaoh's prompt and dogged resistance to God's call that he should free Israel. Egypt was then the chief of the nations in wisdom, wealth, power, and glory. To the proud sovereign of this haughty people a message comes from a God who claims to be the Lord of heaven and earth, the eternal one, Jehovah. The Egyptians, though by that time worshipping many gods, still owned that above all there was the great eternal Deity. From this overlord of heaven and earth the mandate comes to Pharaoh, "Israel is my son, my firstborn" (Exod. 4:22). No wonder if the monarch starts at the words. To him they mean nothing less than that Egypt's supremacy among the nations is to pass to this race of miserable slaves. Greater humiliation could not be: it were worse than the national foe, the Hittites, wresting this glory from him in fair fight: and the foolish king will dare anything rather than consent.

This word of God remains in force. Israel is still God's firstborn among the peoples of the earth, and must, as we have seen, "possess the gate of his enemies" (Gen. 22:17), "and the nation and kingdom that will not serve Israel shall perish" (Isa. 60:12). Referring to that coming period when this shall be fulfilled, and speaking of Israel's King, "David My Servant," Jehovah has said: "I will make him firstborn, the most High to the kings of the earth" (Ps. 89:27. *Variorurm Bible*).

Thus the thought enlarges from the family to the State, and must now expand to the entire universe as the whole realm of God's kingdom. Amongst all the various orders of beings that God will have to His praise in eternal ages, one company is to be to the rest what the firstborn has been shown to be. This company is the church of God: "ye have come unto," ye have membership in "the church [*ekklesia*, the selected, the called out] of the firstborn ones,¹ who are enrolled in heaven." These will have a double share in the Father's inheritance, that is the glory of the spacious and magnificent heavenly regions and conditions, as contrasted with the great but limited glory of the earthly section of the kingdom of God. To them will be given with Christ authority over all other beings, creatures, and things ("all things are yours," 1 Cor. 3:22); and so fully will God dwell in them that they will be intermediaries, "priests," between Him and His universe, "they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with Him" (Rev. 20:6). Well may the same Scripture exclaim, "Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection."

vi. The next point in the panorama of privilege is the relationship of the church to the angelic hosts on a day of festivity to which these will come. The English versions do not rightly divide the clauses here. Commenting on this Alford remarks that "it is difficult to see why the coupling of clause to clause by *kai* (and) which prevails through the sentence, should be broken through"; and Darby (*New Translation*; note) says, "The words 'and' (*kai*) give the division very clearly here," and he translates thus: "and to myriads of angels, the universal gathering"; whilst Alford seeks to give the full force of

¹ The noun is plural, and cannot refer to Christ personally, as is further shown by the plural verb following, "who are enrolled."

the words by rendering, “and to myriads, the festal hosts of angels.” We may therefore read the clause thus, “Ye have come unto. . . myriads of angels, the universal festal gathering.”

And what a vista of splendor thus opens to view as the mind conceives as much as possible of the glory of the Son of God, in Whom “dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily,” coming in His own glory, and in the glory of the Father, and that of the holy angels (Luke 9:26). Such a monarch in such state and with such a retinue will eclipse all that the world ever thought grand and splendid. And in that glory the firstborn are to share, being the “bride, the wife of the Lamb,” who with Christ will be seen “coming down out of heaven from God, having the glory of God” (Rev. 21:9-11). To her as to her Lord the angels will be attendants, for already they are “ministering spirits sent forth to do service for the sake of them that shall inherit salvation” (Heb. 1:14).

But this clause fixes the exact occasion when the church shall enter upon these supreme honors. For this gathering of angels is both “universal,” that is, all the holy hosts will be present at once, and it is also “festal,” that is, the gathering is on an occasion of joy and triumph. The Word of God elsewhere speaks only of one such day, and that the day of Messiah’s appearing in Jerusalem to establish His kingdom on earth. Zechariah foresaw that event, and cried rapturously, “Jehovah my God shall come, and *all the holy ones* with Thee” (14:5); and Christ Himself gathered up this and some other prophecies into the thrilling declaration, “when the Son of man shall come in His glory, and *all the angels* with Him, then shall He sit on the throne of His glory” (Matt. 25:31). Thus shall be fulfilled the promise of God summarized through the angel that announced His birth: “the Lord God shall give unto Him the throne of His father David: and He shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of His kingdom there shall be no end” (Luke 1:32, 33): and then shall come to pass the word concerning the church, “When Christ, our life, shall be manifested [to men on earth], then shall ye also with Him be manifested in glory” (Col. 3:4).

“Let that day come, O Lord,
And other days pass by;
Night is far spent, and dawning tells
That Thou art drawing nigh.

“Hasten Thy coming, Lord!
Dawn, O Thou glorious day!
Then shall the fairest days of earth
Pass into shade away.”

vii. But great as are the things thus enlarged upon, there are greater and higher glories unto which we have drawn near. Ye have come unto “the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem.” During the reign of Christ on earth, Jerusalem, the “city of the great King,” will be His earthly metropolis, and the world’s center. But in the heavenly regions there will be another “city,” of which that on earth is but a reflection. In that

upper realm where the substance of being is spirit, God will have a spiritual metropolis, Himself being the architect that designed and the builder that erected it (Heb. 11:10). And the persons of the church of the firstborn, perfected spirits inhabiting incorruptible spiritual bodies, will form that dwelling place of God.

3. *The Bride is the City.* During the panorama of the Revelation, John had heard a great multitude in heaven rejoicing that the hour had come for the long expected marriage of the Lamb, but he had not yet seen the bride. And it may be that as the mighty visions progressed, and the millennial age passed into the eternal state, he inwardly wondered at this omission. But after all else had been shown to him the Bride was unveiled to his enraptured gaze, for he says (Rev. 21:9, 10): "And there came one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls, who were laden with the seven last plagues; and he spake with me, saying, Come hither, I will shew thee the bride, the wife of the Lamb. And he carried me away in the Spirit to a mountain great and high, and shewed me," shewed me—what? a bride? no, a city, "the holy city, new Jerusalem." So, then, the "city" is the "bride," and the latter being a figure of a company of persons so must the former be. The assertion that the "city" is an *interpretation* of the figure of speech "bride" is not founded on the passage. The angel did not say to John, I will interpret, or explain, to thee the metaphor "bride," but he said, "I will *skew* thee the bride," that is, give thee a vision of her. Thus the "city" is a second vision in symbol of the same company of which the "bride" was the former symbol. Such oriental duplicating of metaphors is common in Scripture. The figure of the bride was no longer adequate to reveal the glory of the church, nor her most exalted office as the dwelling-place of God in a reconciled universe, from which all the wicked had been banished. Therefore the city comes into view; and nature and art and language are exhausted to portray her splendor.

In interpreting this vision one error is particularly common, namely, to speak of the city as a region into which the members of the church of God will enter and be blessed. This notion effectually forbids any right understanding of the matter. The bride, that is, the glorified heavenly church of the first-born ones, *is* the city. Others of the saved enter its gates; these compose it.

It may be hard to assign an exact meaning to each of the details given, but the main features described readily yield their teaching.

i. In the persons of His heavenly saints God will dwell so personally and be so actually present, that they will be to Him what a capital city is to a monarch—a place of residence, a scene for the display of His majesty, a spot to which His subjects may come to have dealings with Him, and a center of government around which the corporate life of the empire may revolve.

ii. "And the wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them twelve names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb" (Rev. 21:14). To members of the church this was not a new thought, for it had been before taught that they, as a body corporate, were "built

upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets” (Eph. 2:20). Historically it is the preaching, teaching, labors, and sufferings of the apostles upon which the church is founded; and of their teaching Christ Jesus Himself was the all-prominent theme (the “chief corner-stone”), binding together the foundation, and affording unity and stability to the building.

iii. “The nations shall walk in the light thereof; and the kings of the earth do bring their glory into it” (Rev. 21:24). It will be under the beneficent guidance of the heavenly saints that the nations, so long “alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them” (Eph. 4:18), will learn to walk in His fear; and they in return will honour those who are thus the occasion of their eternal blessing.

iv. But as it will be by recognizing Israel as the chief nation on earth by God’s will that the Gentiles will own God’s sovereignty, therefore through Israel mediately it is that they will enjoy the blessings dispensed through the church; and hence on the portals of the city are written the names of the tribes of Israel. For the Gentiles the means of access into heavenly blessings will be by honoring Israel (Isa. 14:2; 49: 22, 23; 60:12; 66:20; Zeph. 3:10, marg.: Zech. 8:20-23). It would be as unreasonable to “spiritualize” the literal Israel out of this picture as to “spiritualize” out of it the twelve apostles of the Lamb who are next mentioned (Rev. 21:12, 14).

v. The Holy Spirit of God will thus flow out through the church for the quickening of all, as pictured by the river of the water of life; and it will be in response to obedience that the peoples will have the benefit of the River, for this proceeds out of the *throne* of God and of the Lamb.

Further into such fascinating details we may not give time to go; but it is unto no less privileged service and glories that we have come.¹ Such is the ravishing prospect unto which the saints of this age are called, for God hath called us “unto His own kingdom and glory” (1 Thess. 2:12).

4. But we have anticipated the highest feature of all: “ye have come unto Mount Zion.” In the earthly Jerusalem, two mounts have been prominent, Mount Moriah and Mount Zion. The former was presently crowned with Solomon’s temple; but in the heavenly Jerusalem there is no temple seen (Rev. 21:22), for God no longer dwells hidden behind a veil, or Calvary has made possible His manifest dwelling with men (Rev. 21:3). But Mount Zion is found in His eternal realm. On that hill in the earthly city David’s palace stood (2 Sam. 5:7-9), and it was the supreme court of justice for the kingdom, for “there were set thrones for judgment, the thrones of the house of David” (Ps. 122:5). Not a throne, but thrones, are mentioned. How accurate a prophetic picture of the heavenly things yet to be; for Christ, the son of David, will associate with Himself in His kingly office those who have been counted worthy of their calling, and who have reached this pinnacle of honour to reign with Him for ever and ever (Rev. 22:5). And as many dwelt in Jerusalem and but few comparatively on Mount Zion, is there not here again the suggestion that many more may reach the blessedness of the “city” than will

reach the crowning honour and reign on a throne on Mount Zion? "One star," though truly a star, that is, a heavenly being, "differeth from another star in glory" (1 Cor. 15:41).

Only one man, Moses, was permitted to climb to the top of Sinai; the rest of God's people could but look from afar to that height of glory, and in truth they had little enough desire to draw near to those devouring fires. But many are the sons now being brought unto glory in Christ Jesus, and such as walk in the power of His fellowship may approach unto that same God with boldness. Let us therefore "abide in Christ; that if He shall be manifested, we may have boldness, and not be ashamed from Him at His presence" (1 John 2:28). Let us look to ourselves that we lose not the things that we have wrought, but that we receive a full reward (2 John 8).

Of that supremely and eternally glorious state a sevenfold perfection is declared (Rev. 22:3-5). "There shall be no curse any more"—perfect sinlessness and blessedness: "and the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be therein"—perfect government: "and His servants shall do Him service"—perfect service: "and they shall see His face"—perfect communion: "and His name shall be in their foreheads"—perfect resemblance and identification: "and there shall be night no more"—perfect knowledge and strength: "and they shall reign unto the ages of the ages"—perfect glory.

"Oh, what a bright and blessed world
This groaning earth of ours will be,
When from its throne the tempter hurled
Shall leave it all, O Lord, to thee.

"But brighter far that world above
Where we as we are known shall know;
And, in the sweet embrace of Love,
Reign o'er the ransomed earth below."

Truly it is said of the unspiritual that eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, whatsoever things God prepared for them that love Him. But unto those who, by faith in Christ, have received the Spirit of the Lord, God hath revealed these things so vast and deep and high, for "we received, not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is from God; that we might know the things that are freely given to us by God" (1 Cor. 2:9-12). And therefore, both the knowledge of and the attaining to these things is possible through the Spirit.

Part 3: RECEIVING A KINGDOM THAT CANNOT BE SHAKEN (12:25-29)

With this noble display of the heavenly prospects the mighty argument has reached its climax and it now moves to its conclusion.

1. *Emphatic Recapitulation* (25). “See to it that you do not reject the One speaking: for if those rejecting the one who passed on divine instruction on earth did not escape [penalty], much more [shall not] we, [that is] those turning away from the One from the heavens.

This summarizes the appeal of 10:26-31. To defy Moses was to incur severe penalties; yet he was only an earthly messenger of God, who offered blessings connected with the earth and denounced penalties to be inflicted on earth. But the Messenger now speaking is the Son of God, the Lord from heaven (1:1, 2), as much nobler than Moses as the son is greater than the servant (3:1-4), Whose message opens to faith the sublime privileges laid up in the heavens and warns of penalties more severe than those under the law of Moses.

Now these privileges are based upon that atoning blood which speaks to God in the heavenly sanctuary (ver. 24 above). To turn from *that* blood and *this* Speaker (see 10:29), by reverting to the law, with *its* mediator, Moses, and *its* but typical blood, is to reject the bright reality and return to the shadow. He who thus rejects the heavenly shall pay a severer penalty than he who rejected the earthly.

From this there is no possible escape. In every place in the New Testament this word “escape” has its natural force—*ek-pheugo*, to flee *out of* a place or trouble and be quite clear thereof. It comes only at Luke 21:36; Acts 16:27; 19:16; Rom. 2:3; 2 Cor. 11:33; 1 Thess. 5:3; Heb. 2:3, and here. In comparison with Rom. 2:3 see its use in the Septuagint in the interpolated passage after Esth. 8:13: “they suppose that they shall *escape* the sin-hating vengeance of the ever-seeing God”; also Judges 6:11; Job 15:30; Prov. 10:19. The sense is invariably as stated. One is either completely free from the penalty or completely involved in it, which latter shall certainly be the experience of the one who turns away from the heavenly Speaker.

But the Writer’s words (ver. 25) require strict understanding. It is again shown that not sin by ignorance or inadvertence is in view. He emphasizes his words found at 10:26 that it is if we sin “willfully,” deliberately, knowing what we are doing and adhering to that decision, that the warning operates. They who rejected Moses did so on definite occasions and maintained the disobedience (*paraitesamenoï*, aorist participle); and the Christians here are warned not to do the like (*paraitesesthe*, aorist conjunctive passive); and this “turning away” is not a thoughtless act soon mourned, but is continuous (*apostrephomenoï*, present participle middle).

While this limits the sin in view, yet the form of his sentence emphasizes again that it is Christians who are being warned. He does not use a general or indefinite expression, as, “such as turn away” shall suffer, but he employs again the specific and emphatic “we, that is, those of us who are turning away” (*hemeis hoi apostrophomenoi*), for this was precisely what some of the Christian circle were doing or about to do; and which some have done all the centuries since.

2. *The Past* (ver. 26). The heinousness of such apostasy, such turning away, arises from the majesty of Him from whom one turns. At court it were an unpardonable insult to turn one’s back upon the king, especially should he be speaking. And the One from whom the apostate turns is of incomparable majesty. When of old Sinai’s mighty mass heard the voice of Jehovah “the whole mount quaked greatly” (Exod. 19:18), as it is said in our passage (ver. 26), “Whose voice then shook the earth.”

3. *The Future* (vers. 26, 27). Yet that awesome display of His power is but a trifle as compared with what He will do hereafter; for “now hath He promised, saying, Yet once more will I make to tremble not the earth only, but also the heaven. And this, ‘Yet once more,’ signifieth the removing of those things which are shaken, as of things that have been made, that those things which are not shaken may remain.”

i. The Speaker from heaven is the same Person as He Whose voice shook Sinai. Christ is the Jehovah of the Old Testament. The Legislator is the Redeemer, the Redeemer remains the Legislator.

ii. Warnings are promises: “He hath *promised*” to shake earth and heaven, and He will keep His promise, whether of mercy or of wrath. Comp. 2 Tim. 2:11-13.

iii. The future disturbances of nature will test the heavenly regions as well as the earth.

iv. The period for this is significant, and is easily learned from Hag. 2:6-9 whence the promise is quoted. The whole prophecy reads:

For thus saith the Lord of hosts: Yet once, it is a little while, and I will shake the heavens, and the earth, and the sea, and the dry land; and I will shake all nations, and the desirable things of all nations shall come, and I will fill this house with glory, saith the Lord of hosts. The silver is mine and the gold is mine, saith the Lord of hosts. The latter glory of this house shall be greater than the former, saith the Lord of hosts: and in this place will I give peace, saith the Lord of hosts.

(1) The subject is the house of God at Jerusalem. The Jews who had returned from Babylon were building the second temple. To the old among these the prophet addresses the question: “Who is left among you that saw this house in its former glory? and how do you see it now? is it not in your eyes as nothing?” (Hag. 2:3). Thus did God identify this second and smaller temple with that former and nobler temple, speaking of

“*this* house in its former glory.” It is then added: “the precious things of all nations shall come, and I will fill *this* house with glory, saith Jehovah of hosts,” the precious things being the silver and the gold next mentioned. In consequence “the latter glory of *this* house shall be greater than the former, saith Jehovah of hosts.”

Now it is clear that these promises have not yet been fulfilled. Herod the Great did indeed enlarge and adorn that second temple, but it never approached to the magnificence of Solomon's temple. There must therefore be built in Jerusalem in days to come a temple grander than even the first. This is the consistent prediction of all Scripture, as Zech. 6:12, 13; 14:20, 21 (Zechariah spoke at the same time as Haggai): Ps. 24, esp. ver. 3; Isa. 66:22-24; Ezek. 20:40-48; etc. The suggestion that all these and other passages, in the Old Testament and the New Testament, find fulfillment in the present spiritual house of God, the church, empties Scripture of any definite meaning or accomplishment, indeed, it sets aside the plain force of the Word of God.

The three-fold “*this* house” of Haggai definitely identifies the second temple with the first, and the third and future temple with the first and second: in God's view they are all one house. This *compels* the view that the third *must* be as literal as its predecessors with which it is identified and must stand upon the same site at Jerusalem.

(2) This future temple is to be built by Messiah, “the man Whose name is the Branch,” Who “shall bear the glory, and shall sit and rule upon his throne, and he shall be a priest upon his throne” (Zech. 6:12, 13). The era is therefore that of the millennial reign of Christ.

(3) This is confirmed by the feature that “all nations” shall be disturbed: “I will shake all nations.” Comp. Jer. 25:26, 29-33, where judgment is denounced five times against “all the inhabitants of the earth.” See also Ezek. 39:21; Zech. 14:2; Matt. 25:32; Ps. 75:3, 8; all pointing to the time of Christ's coming in judgment.

(4) Other scriptures speak of this shaking of all nature as to take place at that epoch.

Isa. 2:19, 21 speaks twice of Jehovah arising “to shake mightily the earth.” Isa. 13:13 says: “Therefore I will make the heavens to tremble, and the earth shall be shaken out of its place, in the wrath of Jehovah of hosts, and in the day of His fierce anger.” See also Isa. 24:1, 19, 20; Joel 2:10, 11; Nah. 1:3-6. Also the Lord foretold in detail the same disturbances as to occur in connection with His return in glory, saying that “the powers of the heavens shall be shaken” (Matt. 24:29) as well as there be “roaring of the sea and the billows” (Luke 21:25-26; see also Ps. 46:1-3), which dread panorama the *Revelation* expands in lurid fullness (ch. 6:12-16; chs. 8, 9, and 16) as ushering in the reign of Christ on earth.

(5) This shaking is not, however, the final cataclysm of the purifying wrath of God which will come at the close of the Millennium, for that will not be only a *shaking* of

heaven and earth but a *dissolving* of their very elements, and the agency will be fervent fire, not merely agitation. This shaking is to be at the opening of the kingdom era, not at its close.

(6) The shaking here foretold is to be the final occasion when God will use this form of testing and judgment. Earth and heaven were agitated when God came to Sinai (Exod. 19:18; Judges 5:4, 5; Ps. 77:16-20; 114). These frequent mentions over many centuries indicate how terrific was that disturbance of nature and how deeply its lesson was impressed on pious men.

But the coming shaking shall far exceed that in extent and degree, for the heavens shall be involved, and the effect shall be “the removing of those things that are shaken, as of things that have been made, that those things which are not shaken may remain” (ver. 27). Then shall be fulfilled Ps. 93:1: “Jehovah reigneth. . . . The world also is established, that it cannot be moved.”

4. Here is announced a *vital principle*, a fundamental necessity. If a building is to be permanent weak materials and constructions must be removed. Some years ago it was found that St. Paul’s Cathedral was in danger; whereupon old and decaying timbers were removed and replaced by sound beams, and other measures taken to assure stability. In the kingdom of God there arose of old sin and its inevitable weakness, and ever since there has developed more and more the need that this shall be eliminated. Hence the shakings and shatterings known in individual experience by the people of God; hence the perpetual attacks of Satan and the world upon the churches of God; hence the ceaseless overthrowing of all human institutions; hence that coming overturning of the government of heaven and earth by angels—all things must be shaken terribly that the base and weak elements may collapse and make room for that which is divine, holy, stable.

This is the proper force of the word *metathesis* translated by “removed.” It signifies the substituting of one thing by another, as a name, an opinion, an institution. This is exhibited in ch. 7:12, which speaks of the substitution of the new priesthood and law in place of the Mosaic, using this word and its root.

And this shows the sense of the phrase “as of things that have been *made*.” For *poieo* does not here refer to the original creation of the substance of things, or the passage would require a new thought evidently foreign to it, even that *all* things would be “removed,” whether good or bad, strong as well as weak. But the statement as given is that some things are to be shaken and “removed” in order that other things, being unshakable, may remain. Yet these last have been “made” in the sense of being created.

The word *poieo* has therefore here its sense of existing things being arranged and instituted in certain relations to each other. It is not the annihilation of substance that is in view, but the annulling of relationships and the substituting of different

relationships and institutions, suitable to the kingdom of God and capable of being everlasting.

Of these new institutions the principal will be that overthrowing of the existing angelic government, and the installing of the Son of man and His heavenly people in place of them, which has been before considered.

And this is the force of the statement before us that believers are in process of “receiving a kingdom” (ver. 28). What this means may be learned from Dan. 5:31: Darius the Mede received the kingdom,” where the Septuagint uses the same terms as in our passage (*parelabe ten basileian*). Or one may consider Mordecai’s question to the *queen*: “Who knoweth whether thou art not *come to the kingdom* for such a time as this?” (Esther 4:14).

5. *Summary of the Five Warnings.* Thus the period of this shaking, as well as its accompaniment and results, show that the millennial epoch and kingdom are in view. This final warning is therefore in harmony with the earlier warnings. In ch. 2 the “great salvation” is the heavenly prospects of the disciples of Christ who attain to the first resurrection. In chs. 3 and 4 Canaan is used as a foreshadowing of the millennial rest, which will be entered by only the diligent. In ch. 6 the forfeiting of Canaan warns of the peril that apostasy from Christ may forfeit that heavenly portion. This is yet more heavily enforced in ch. 10, and positive penalties are added to the negative loss of glory. And here in ch. 12 the prospect of receiving a kingdom is the ground for being stable as believers, seeing that only such shall abide the testings and meet the requirements of that great day, and that the penalty of instability, of not heeding and obeying the One speaking from heaven, is inescapable (ver. 25).

6. *Exhortation* (vers. 28, 29). “Let us have grace.” Upon what, therefore, shall the Christian concentrate so as to avoid the perils and secure his privileges? The Writer answers—upon GRACE. The danger underlying all dangers, against which pre-eminently he warns, is that of turning back from grace to law, ceremonies, self-effort as the basic principle of life. The urgent call is to trust in God as “the God of all grace,” for it is in this character that He has called us unto His eternal glory in Christ, and it is on this principle of grace that He undertakes to see us through the sufferings of the journey and perfect, stablish, and strengthen us (1 Pet. 5:10). This wholly unmerited and entirely adequate favor of God is made available in Christ His Son and only in Him. It is by reliance upon Him in His various offices and service that the believer acquires in daily experience “all things that pertain unto life and godliness” (2 Pet. 1:3).

Therefore let faith adhere to this as the principle of all dealings with God, for so, and only so, shall we be able to “offer service well-pleasing to God” (ver. 28). To be well-pleasing to Him is the indispensable matter as regards attaining to what grace makes possible in Christ (ch. 11:5, 6); and for this faith and its fruits are the secret, and “dead works” are to be wholly renounced (9:14).

But living by the grace of our holy God is a serious matter. A just appreciation of His marvelous grace to us godless and guilty sinners produces “reverence and awe” (ver. 28). Let the Christian look steadily and long at these words “*reverence and awe.*” They are a New Testament form of this Old Testament promise: “to this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and that *trembleth at My word*” (Isa. 66:2). It is with such that God dwells and whose spirit He revives, so that they do not collapse under the strain of life (Isa. 57:15).

John Woolman says of a gathering of Quakers that “there was an awesome sense of the presence of God.” Is this what they seek who arrange “bright hours” and other devices for pleasing the carnal mind? Too truly has it been said that the present age, in religion as in things secular, is marked by specific levity instead of specific gravity. Therefore does our Writer remind us that grace produces reverence and awe, not frivolity and flippancy; and therefore does he close this exhortation with the reminder that “our God is a consuming fire,” which must and will burn up all that is not suitable to His holiness and glory.

The intense word “consume” *katanalisko* the Writer borrowed from the Greek Old Testament he so much used. It means to devour completely, to dissolve. He quotes from Deut. 4:24, where, warning Israel against forgetfulness of their God, and the resulting substitution of something else as the object of their hearts, Moses said, “For Jehovah thy God is a devouring fire, a jealous God.” Now jealousy is an outcome of love. A man does not feel jealous that a woman he does not love should give herself to some other man. It is God’s love of holiness that makes Him to bum against sin. It is His love for His people that compels Him to consume out of them all that is contrary to Himself and to their true welfare. If we respond to His grace, tremble at His word, serve Him with reverence and awe, then will He rejoice in us and we in Him; but if we provoke Him to jealousy with our vanities then must we learn by painful yet, at the last, salutary experience, that “*our God is a consuming fire,*” even as was before shown at ch. 10:27.

The Epistle to the Hebrews: A Practical Treatise for Plain and Serious Readers
(Chapters 16, 17, 18) by G. H. Lang.

First Printing, The Paternoster Press, 1951

Second Printing, Schoettle Publishing Company, Inc., 1985

Schoettle Publishing Company, Inc.

P.O. Box 1246

Hayesville, NC 28904

(706) 892-3333

Special permission has been granted to InTheBeginning.org by Schoettle Publishing Company, Inc. to copy these chapters from **The Epistle to the Hebrews: A Practical Treatise for Plain and Serious Readers** by G. H. Lang.

These pages may NOT be reproduced or altered for any pecuniary or publishing purposes without expressed permission from the publishing company.

Original document was scanned with an [Epson 636 Expression scanner](#) using [TextBridge Pro98](#) software as the interface to [WORD97](#).