

Record of Sermons delivered during the month of
March 2019

(added progressively after each Sunday)

(see following pages)

Three Rules for Living the Christian Life

per S Olyott

(review so far)

These Hebrews were Jews. They had become Christians but were now thinking of turning away from the Christian faith, and going back to their Judaism. And as we've been studying this epistle over many months we notice that the Apostle has been very blunt with them. It's not popular to be blunt! But he's been surprisingly blunt even by our modern standards, and told them that if they turn away from Christ, and turn their backs to Christ. If they go back to what they left originally. They will be lost!

He's told them that the only safe course of action, for any who profess to be Christians, is to go on, and on, and on ... in the Christian life. The only safe course of action. There's nobody like the Lord Jesus Christ. There's nobody like Him, in who He is! There's nobody like Him, in what He's done! He is the light of the Glory of God. If you turn your back on the Glory of God in the face of the Lord Jesus Christ, there is only one place you can go: And that is 'Outer Darkness'.

We come to chapter 12. He's told us that if you have a genuine faith in Christ, you'll live in that faith and you'll die in that faith. He's told us that if you have a genuine faith in Christ, there is nothing that can extinguish that true faith. He's given us all sorts of examples, of people who have lived by faith, and died in faith, who are on their way to their Heavenly reward. So it's with all those truths that I have just summarised, fresh in his mind that the Apostle writes, "Therefore ... "

(verse 1) In other words, "In light of the things I've already said to you, I have a further thing to say."

So let us look together at these first four verses and notice first of all, that this passage, contains a vivid picture: Imagine we're at the Olympic Games. We're in an immense stadium, crowded with people. There are races being run. Again and again we watch athletes come onto the track. If it were today, of course, and we were watching it on the television, we would see them in all their fancy tracksuits. Then they would prepare with great seriousness for their race!

But this is the First Century games. If that man runs with that cloak or toga on, it will trip him up. It will impede his progress. So he laid aside anything that would impede his progress. Race after race now is taking place in these games. The races are difficult. They're endurance races. The men are panting. But they keep going! They may be tempted to drop out. But in these games, which the Apostle is talking about, the prize is not given to the person who gets to the tape first. The prizes are given to everybody who finishes the course!

So again and again (and we can see this in verse 3) we see a man running and he is tempted, through weariness, to give up the race. And again, at verse 3, he's running and running in his race, and he's tempted, because he feels faint, to drop out. But no he keeps going, and going ... At last he finishes and he enters into his reward!

As each person finishes in this race, in the vivid picture that the Apostle is giving, the successful runner takes his place in the stands. Note the stands: they're all around us. They contain the people who have already run their race. So for each person who runs the race, he runs it with the knowledge that he is observed and he's surrounded by people who have already been through what he's going through. And that spurs him on! They got to the end of the race. He must get to the end of the race. They got right to the tape, without dropping out, and he's going to get to the tape without dropping out. He's surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses. It's a spur to him in his own running. He's not facing any difficulty that the others haven't faced. He must go on, and on, and on ... Just a certainly as they reach the tape and enter into their reward, if he goes on, and on, and on, he will enter into his reward.

And now Christian friends. It's our turn to take to the track. All the eyes are now upon us. There's nobody running the Christian life, at the moment, except the Christians who are alive this instant (on the 3rd of March 2019). There's nobody else on the track except us. And all the ones who have successfully run the race before us: we are surrounded by them -- as a great cloud of witnesses. But best of all! The Person who has run the race perfectly before, who entered us for the race, is standing by the tape. Let us put the question: You don't face any difficulty in the Christian life, which they've not already faced. Are you now going to drop out? Are you now going to falter? Are you now going to leave the track? Are you now going to give up? Are you going to fail to enter what so many millions, before you, have entered?

That's what the Hebrews were on the verge of doing. They were on the verge of dropping out of the race. They we're on the verge of giving up. They were on the verge of losing their reward. They were on the verge of going back.

How can we keep going in the Christian life? Tomorrow and the rest of the week. It's so hard to be a Christian at work. Hard at school or University. Hard at home. How can I keep going in the Christian life? What's the secret, of keeping going?

Well the Apostle tells us: Here in this passage. How to do well in the Christian life. How to keep going right to the end. So that you don't give up and go out and be lost. This message this morning, is the difference between keeping going, thus entering into the 'rest', and dropping out and being lost.

The Apostle then in this passage, gives us three rules. But a word of caution. Listen carefully to God's Word and not what other people are saying.

There are some people who are, as it were, standing on the 'touchline' and they're saying, "You'll never get anywhere in the Christian life unless"

All sorts of people standing on the touchline, and saying: "You'll never get anywhere in the Christian life unless you're baptised in a particular way by the Holy Spirit. You'll never get anywhere in the Christian life unless you're sealed again by the Spirit. You'll never get anywhere at all, unless the Lord sends a revival. You'll never get anywhere in the Christian life unless you receive a specific spiritual gift. You'll never get anywhere in the spiritual life unless you have some crisis by which the old nature dies." These are all the sorts of things that people at the 'touchline' are saying. Generally speaking they're telling you that you won't get anywhere in the Christian life, unless you have some momentous, mystical, powerful, wonderful, "second experience".

You are 'charged' this morning and continuing next time, to listen to the Word and not to listen to them. Here are three Apostolic rules: for successfully living and dying in the Christian faith. Here are three Apostolic rules for running the race successfully. Here are three of the Apostolic rules for not dropping out. For reaching the tape. For entering the reward. The first four verses of Hebrews 12. The difference between keeping going and entering into heaven, and dropping out – being lost. Depends on these three Apostolic rules.

1. (verse 1) *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.* Keyword: "lay aside". Rule number 1: Strip for action! If you run in that cloak or toga, you'll soon see that it wraps around you. Encircles you. Traps you. Clings to you. (The Greek word has the sense, that it "ambushes you") You try to run in a toga! Wrap a sheet around you and try and run. You'll see exactly what the Apostle's getting at. "Take it off! The sin which clings so closely, that you are so easily ambushed or encircled, or trapped, beset, or hindered by.

Here the Apostle is not giving us an individual choice. He is saying, "Is there a sin in your life? Any sin! Lay it aside. Finish with it."

Here then is a call to self-examination. Every sin is a hindrance to Christian living. Every sin makes Apostasy possible. If there is any sin in my life I am declared to at once get rid of it. Anything is sin, that does not leave me to love my God with all my heart, soul, mind and strength, and my neighbour as myself.

Anything is sin that is an infringement of the Ten Commandments. Because there is something bigger in my life than God. Or I'm worshipping something other than God. Taking the Name of God in vain.

Mortify it! Put it aside. Strip for action as it were.

But that's not all he says: "Let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely" In other words the Apostle is saying that not everything, that

gets in the way of Christian living, is, in and of itself, sin. There are some things that are not wrong in themselves, but they hinder my spiritual effectiveness. There are some things that are not wrong in and of themselves, but they weaken my faith. There are some things that are not wrong in and of themselves, but they dampen my zeal. There are some things that are not intrinsically evil, but they reduce my power, to resist temptation. There are some things that the Ten Commandments do not condemn, but none the less they do tend to enslave me. Those things – those 'weights' – also must be put aside.

Now they may be beautiful things; they may be intellectual things; may be noble things. But anything at all, even if, it is not condemned by the 10 Commandments, yet gets in the way of my Christian progress – even if it's not low or vulgar – must be laid aside.

There's nothing intrinsically wrong with football. But if it is the thing in your life that triggers off bad temper, you'd be better to hang up your boots and puncture your football. There's nothing wrong with driving a car. But if you drive a car and become a 'devil' behind the wheel. Consistently break speed limits and shout abuse at people even if they don't hear you! You'll be better off tearing up your licence. There's nothing wrong with leisure education classes, but if self-education classes keep you from throwing in your lot, 'hook, line and sinker' with the local church, you'd be better off being ignorant of such skills.

There's probably nothing wrong with a particular job. But if a job means more to you than your God, you'd be better off on the dole. And so on.

Is there anything in my life which is impeding my progress – not wrong in and of itself – but I could run better without it?

"Then strip off for action," says the Apostle. If you're not making spiritual progress, it's not from what these people are saying at the touchline. (they're saying, "Christian friend you're not making Christian progress because something hasn't happened to you." They're wrong! If you're not making progress in the Christian life, it's because there's something impeding your progress, which has to be put away. The reason you may not be making progress is because it hasn't been put away. Find what it is and deal with it.

[2034]

May it please God that all present, through Jesus Christ, shall have life through His Name.

Delivered Sunday 10th March 2019

[No printed sermon: Service conducted by Rev J Cabrera]

Three Rules for Living the Christian Life – Pt 2

per S Olyott

(review so far)

In considering Hebrews Chapter 12:1-4, last time, we found the writer using the well known pastime of Greek sporting games as a model for the way to make progress in the Christian Life. *let us run with endurance the race that is set before us,*

There are any number of well meaning and sincere professing Christians who will give advice on this topic, especially of the Charismatic persuasion. But we need to carefully consider what God (through the Apostle) has actually said, rather than be swayed by personal, but errant, opinion.

The Apostle has laid out three rules that must be heeded if we are to continue to live in the faith and to die, still in it. Thus reaching God's 'rest'.

The first of these was:

1. "Then strip off for action," says the Apostle. If you're not making spiritual progress, it's not from what these people are saying at the touchline. (they're saying, "Christian friend you're not making Christian progress because something hasn't happened to you." They're wrong! If you're not making progress in the Christian life, it's because there's something impeding your progress, which has to be put away. The reason you may not be making progress is because it hasn't been put away. Find what it is and deal with it.
2. (the second part of verse 1) Let us run with endurance (patience) the race that is set before us. One could put rule number 2 like this: Learn to say, "Come What May!" To explain: The Christian life isn't an easy stroll. It requires effort. That's why the Apostle uses the phrase, 'run with endurance'. There are many difficulties. There are difficulties at every step. There is temptation to 'drop out' at every second. That's why he calls for patient endurance. And this Christian life isn't a path of our own choosing -- it's a path of God's choosing. It's a race that is 'set before us'.

Consider the sport of Cross Country Running. Competitors complain of their legs feeling like lead. As the race continues lungs begin to pain, they seem to swell almost to burst from the chest! The temples begin to throb. Then the point is reached when you feel you can't run another step. And there's a great swamp of mud you've got to get through; a gate to vault; a ditch to jump. Just about finished but there's still 3 kilometres to go!

Only one thing keeps a cross country runner going: Determination. Endurance: Come what may! Keep going come what may. It's exactly what the Greek means when it calls for 'endurance' in verse 1.¹ Patient endurance! The only

¹ ὑπομονῆς (hypomonēs) 5281 *hypomoné* (from [5259](#) /*hypó*, "under" and [3306](#) /*ménō*, "remain, endure") – properly, *remaining under*, endurance; steadfastness, especially as *God enables* the believer to "*remain (endure) under*" the challenges He allots in life. (Come What May)

way to keep going in the Christian life is to say, "Come what may, I'll keep going! Whatever happens to me, and especially: whatever I feel; whether I'm on my own or not; even if I'm laughed at; however great the difficulties; whatever the arguments; even if the cost is total cost. I will keep going. Come what may. And you will. The strength will be given you from above. That's what it means: to deny yourself! Take up the Cross daily, and to follow Him.

3. We just mentioned, 'following Him'. In the first rule, we were to strip for action. Anything that gets in the way: leave it. The second rule is learn to say, "Come What May; nothing will move me from progress in the Christian life; Nothing will stop me going forward." But you won't go forward unless you obey the third rule:

The third rule is verse 2. Looking unto Jesus. And the third rule is also Verse 3: Consider Him!

The Apostle has been saying this all the way through the letter. They would say, "We want to go back to the Old Testament sacrifices."

"How can you?" says the Apostle! "Jesus Christ's sacrifice is superior. Look to Him! You'll never want to go back to that."

"We want to go back to an Old Testament tabernacle."

"How can you? Look to Jesus: see what tabernacle He's in, and you'll never want to go back to that."

"We want to go back to an Old Testament priesthood."

"How can you? See what a Priest He is. See it clearly, you'll never want to go back."

Yet, this morning, some people would think that life without Jesus has its attractions! But we have one, long, clear, vision of the Lord Jesus Christ. We never want to go back to life, without Him.

The problem this morning can be not having a clear view of the Saviour. Never having sat down recently to ponder – what He's done. Who He is. Why He did it. What He gives sinners, in this life.

Never sat down and looked, and considered: the Lord Jesus Christ.

Now the Apostle gives us here, some reasons, for looking to Christ. (verse 2) ... *looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith.*

Look back to our earlier example of a Cross Country Race: First of all the 'good' coach appears. When the race started, who fired the gun? Coach! When you're halfway through the course and you think you can't keep going, who should be standing at the most difficult ditch of all? Coach! (how he got there was a mystery but he was there). When you see that last straight – still 3 kilometres to go. The land is flat, you can see the finishing line. Who's there as you come to

the last straight? Coach! When at last you burst through that tape, who's the fellow that's holding the tape? You guessed it: Coach!

But then there is another coach. When he fired the gun that was the last you ever saw of him. Nobody at the most difficult ditch of all. When you felt like packing it in. Still nobody! When you ran in the last straight, you were all alone. When you returned to the pavilion he'd already gone home!

You'd run better for the good coach wouldn't you? He was the beginner and the finisher of the race. He entered you for the race, and he held the tape at the end. And he was there at every point throughout the race, as well!

At every point in my Christian life, the Person who entered me for the race is there. At every difficult ditch. At every awful temptation, He is still there. And when I come to the tape -- I enter into the grave -- He's still there! Still there! And as long as I look at Him I'm heartened, encouraged and spurred forward.

Once He's out of my mind, I fall out of the race. So I must keep looking unto Jesus. Jesus: the pioneer and perfecter, the beginner and the finisher of my faith.

And I must learn from His example. Look at verse 2: *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.* The Lord Jesus Christ Himself has run the life of faith. (He walked this world by faith, you know. Not by sight!) What kept the Lord Jesus going? He who ran the race perfectly! How come He endured the hateful murder, by his enemies. What kept Him going right through the Cross and agonising shame? He never lost sight of the joy that was set before Him. He's there now. At the right hand of the throne of God. He shows to us that all who lived the life of faith, and we, are sustained by keeping our eyes on the heavenly reward. There is a Heavenly reward! And the proof of it is: that the 'file leader' -- the One who has run ahead of us -- has already entered into that reward.

I can take heart knowing that the way I have to run, my Lord has already run. He shows to me, beyond dispute, that the road I run is the heavenly road.

Consider verses three and four: Here we can recognise what will happen if we take our eyes off Christ! ³ *Consider him who endured from sinners such hostility against himself, so that you may not grow weary or faint-hearted.* ⁴ *In your struggle against sin you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood.*

Look at your Lord Jesus Christ: He was surrounded by hostility, yet He kept going! Yet there is something He faced that you've not yet faced: He was put to

death! "It may come to some of you," said the Apostle. "But whatever difficulty comes to you, you'll give up. Unless your eyes are squarely upon Christ."

Some (verse 3) will give up gradually. The word 'weary' in Greek² has the sense of giving up gradually. Beginning to slow down; then walking; then sitting down; then you die spiritually! Some people give up the Christian faith like that. First this slips; then that; stopping all involvement; and then their spiritual life is ebbing away!

Others give up suddenly. (the Greek word translated faint-hearted in our translation, suggests the passive state of the heart. However the Greek has more to do with an action³) The 'faint' used here is a man running for all he is worth. Suddenly it's too much for him and he drops on the track. (the sudden discharge of a bowstring action) Some apparent Christian's give up like that! One day they're here, they're fully filled with zeal for Christ, but tomorrow they've walked out on Him suddenly and decisively.

"You take your eyes off the Lord Jesus Christ." says the Apostle, "and either one or the other will happen to you." There are only two alternatives: keep close to Christ or be eternally separated from him! Go on in the race with him before you, or drop out of the race and be lost. The example, the good example, of others may spur you on a little, but nothing will actually keep you going, accept a clear vision of Christ.

There are marvellous older Christians some who are now in glory. As you think of them you think that you want to do well in the Christian life, as they did, but even that won't keep you going. Not even this *great cloud of witnesses*, if your eyes are not firmly on the Lord Jesus Christ.

Keeping going in the Christian life depends then, upon these three rules:

1. Strip for action. Declare war on sin.
2. "Come what may": I determine that I will go forward and nothing will stop me.
3. I keep close to my Saviour. Keeping Him in my vision.

Will you finish the race? Will you take your place back in the pavilion? Will you gather where all the other men and women of faith gather? For the prize giving.

Or will you slack off; drop off; and be lost. Eternal issues like that are decided by a reaction, to a message like Hebrews Chapter 12 verses 1 to 4

[1843]

May it please God that all present, through Jesus Christ, shall have life through His Name.

2 **κάμητε** (*kamēte*) – become weary

3 **ἐκλύομενοι** (*eklyomenoi*) 1590 *eklyō* (from 1537 /*ek*, "out from and to" and 3089 /*lyō*, "loose, let go") – properly, let completely out as to (*entirely*) *succumb*, i.e. with the *outcome* of losing inner strength; hence, to become weary (exhausted), to the point of *fainting*.

Why So Many Difficulties in the Christian Life?

per S Olyott

(review so far)

Isaac Watts wrote a hymn, calling on us to be courageous. It was because the Hebrews had lost their courage that we come to today's Passage. This is why the Apostle wrote these words. Also Isaac Watts tells us that we are not to tire along the heavenly road. It was precisely because they were 'tiring along the heavenly road' that the Apostle wrote chapter 12 of Hebrews and in particular the passage for this fortnight: verses 5 to 17.

We've learnt in recent weeks that if we don't keep going in the Christian life to the very end we shall be lost. Many are shocked by this teaching finding it hard to reconcile it to the security of the believer to Eternity. (The "P" of 'TULIP' and WCF 17:1 The Certainty of Persevering.) Perhaps we need to be reminded what the Bible teaches about the final Perseverance of the saints. Not the eternal security of the professing Christian. Some professing Christian's think they can live as they please once they've made that profession of Faith as a Christian. This is a grave mistake. The clear teaching of Hebrews, that we've seen now for many months, is that you'll be lost, if you don't go forward and keep going forward to the very hour of your death. You'll be lost!

We learnt, last week, 3 Apostolic rules for running the heavenly race:

1. Strip for action. If there's anything in the way, whatever it is, even if it's not a sin in and of itself; anything in the way that is holding up your Christian progress. Get rid of it! That's an Apostolic command.
2. Learn to say "Come What May". Learn to be a person who says, "Come What May, I will make progress in the Christian life. Nothing will stop me." *Run with patience (endurance) the race that is set before us.*
3. Always look to Jesus. Consider him. Because the solemn truth is that once the Lord Jesus Christ is out of your mind, you are out of the race.

Today we come to Verse 5 onwards: Those rules, from last time, are the difference between going on and entering heaven or going back and being lost. But somebody's already asking: "Very well but I don't understand why there has to be so many difficulties in the Christian life. Why is it that every step of the way there has to be temptation? Why is it that it seems that every day of the Christian life there has to be opposition? Why is it that so often there has to be some form of distress or pain? Some problem. Some trouble. Some difficulty! Why, O why, can't the Christian life be, easy!"

It's because people were asking that sort of question, and didn't know the answer, that they were thinking of going back and out. So the Apostle gives us the answer to that

question. He tells us why there has to be problems in the Christian life. Why there has to be difficulty. Why there has to be trouble.

He does it by two 'pictures': Verses 5 to 11, using the 'picture' of a family and in verses 12 to 17, he goes back to his 'picture' of running a race.

Verses 5-11: Learn now why there has to be trouble in your Christian life. (Note the parallel with 1 Peter 1:6-12)

We start by looking at verses 5-6. "The reason why you may not understand that there has to be trouble in the Christian life, is because you haven't read The Book of Proverbs recently!" Says the Apostle. "The reason for your perplexity. The reason you can't answer the question: 'why there has to be problems?' Is because you've overlooked Proverbs."

So the Apostle quotes two verses from Proverbs 3 (11 & 12) ⁵ *And have you forgotten the exhortation that addresses you as sons?*

*"My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord,
nor be weary when reprov'd by him.*

⁶ *For the Lord disciplines the one he loves,
and chastises every son whom he receives."*

Keywords 'discipline', 'reprov'd', 'chastises' and '**loves**'.

"Let me explain what I mean," says the Apostle in verse 7. "God is bringing painful experiences into your life!" (Let's get that straight before we proceed this morning: It's God who brings painful experiences into our lives -- as we found in the bible study where we noted what Peter has to say at the beginning of his first letter. While Job found that it was the devil who brought painful experiences into his life he nevertheless knew that the devil was under the superintendence of God (although God is in no way the author of evil.) Therefore he said, (Job 1:21) "the Lord gave and the Lord takes away, blessed be the Name of the Lord. (Job 2:10) We received good from the hand of the Lord shall we not also receive evil." So he knew that every painful experience in the final analysis was from God.

Every painful experience that you have and I have as a Christian is from God. The Heavenly Father allows His children to be hurt. He is dealing with you as a father deals with his son's – his children. Have you ever heard of a child, loved by his father, whom the father didn't punish? Disciplined! Rebuked! Have you ever heard of such a son? Any who have experience of proper family life: you know that rebuke and punishment are as much a part of loving family life, as cuddles at bedtime.

Verse 7: It is for discipline that you have to endure. God is treating you as sons. For what son is there whom his father does not discipline?

So to verse 8: If your boy or girl broke, deliberately, a neighbour's window. What would you do? ... But, if a neighbour's child broke another neighbour's window what would you do? ... You only chastise one of those children because only the one is your child. It's your children you discipline. Because you love them and you live for their good in a way that you don't live for other's children. That's why you chastise yours. That's why you rebuke them. Because you, in that sense, 'own' them. You love them. You care for them. You want the best for them. That discipline, so given, is as much a sign of your total acceptance as the fondest cuddle.

In the same way you set your child difficult tasks to do. You don't make life totally easy for your boy or girl. Do you? You may set them things to do that are slightly too hard for them, at first. You arrange for them to have all sorts of challenging experiences in their life. Some of those experiences are quite trying. You do it deliberately. All part of the training and discipline you give to your child, to prepare them for life. And the only reason you put them through these difficult trials and experiences, giving them things that initially appear to be too hard for them. The only reason you do it: you love him, you love her, deeply because you care for that child in a way that you don't for other's children.

It's by the discipline and training, by the fathers, that we are acknowledged as true son's and daughters.

Verse 8: God is a perfect father! And we can be sure that He will chastise His children, without exception. All his children are partakers of painful experiences. If you claim to be His child and you have no painful experiences in this life then there can only be one explanation: You are a spurious son. You are not accepted as His child. It's because He does accept His chosen, His elect, that He brings painful experiences into their lives. This is the proof of their son-ship.

"Now, then," continues the Apostle, "since we had earthly fathers who corrected us, it shouldn't surprise us that we have a heavenly spiritual Father who does the same." What was your attitude to your earthly father's correction? What reaction did my father's correction instil in me? How about yours? Perhaps not at the time but now we appreciate the proper parenting that we received. If that's the effect that earthly discipline from earthly fathers has on us, how much more should that be the case when Heavenly discipline from a Heavenly Father is our experience? Earthly discipline did as good. God's discipline is not to rail against. It is to do me good. God's discipline isn't something to grumble about. God's discipline isn't something to resent. God's discipline is something to submit to. Something to accept with appreciation. It's intended for my good. By God's discipline, I live!

Isn't that what the Scripture says? ⁹ *Besides this, we have had earthly fathers who disciplined us and we respected them. Shall we not much more be subject to the Father of spirits and live?*

Finally for today, we look at verses 10 and 11: There are differences between the disciplines of our earthly fathers and the discipline of our Heavenly Father. The Apostle now explains them. Earthly fathers only exercise their discipline for a short period. The years of childhood and part of adolescence. Eventually this is over and the child is free from this. And it must be admitted that because earthly fathers are sinful humans, some discipline was for their own ends, not the child's. Perhaps the children were sent to bed early because Mum and Dad just wanted, time out! But God's discipline, verse 10, is always for our benefit. When God brings a painful experience into my life. It's always for my profit. Always for my good. God's motives are never selfish. His sole intention, every time, is that I might be receiving his holiness. That something of His character, may begin to take form in my life.

The Lord Jesus Christ used the different 'picture'. He used the example of the pruning knife, used on the vine. That painful cutting is designed so that the vine will produce more fruit. God brings painful experiences into our lives, not for his own pleasure, but for our benefit and good.

Verse 11: However whether it's an earthly father who corrects me, or the heavenly father who corrects me. It's never appreciated at the time. Yet the final results make it worthwhile. *'Later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.'*

To sum up this section we refer back to verse 5: When trouble comes into your life don't despise it. Resent it. Don't faint – don't make it an excuse for giving up. Now to the end of verse 9: When trouble comes into your life: take it! Submit to it. Embrace it. Your heavenly Father sent it. He works all things after His own will. And see it (verse 7 & 11) as the convincing proof, that God accepts you as His child. See it as the convincing proof, that God intends nothing for you, except your good.

There has to be illness in the Christian life. There has to be persecution. There has to be difficulty. There have to be problems; trouble; heartache. Otherwise we are not God's children at all, and you will make no progress in holiness. You'll not progress in the 'race'.

[1906]

May it please God that all present, through Jesus Christ, shall have life through His Name.

Why So Many Difficulties in the Christian Life? – Pt 2

per S Olyott

(review so far)

We look now at verses 12 to 17: He's told us why there has to be trouble in the Christian life. He now tells us the effect, that this teaching should really have in practical terms. He's used the picture of the family: The father and the son. But now he goes back to the 'picture' of the race, which he used in the first four verses. We now adjust out mental thinking in that direction, while keeping the lessons we've just learnt in our minds, but apply those lessons back to the picture of the Christian life as a race: a tape to which we're running and a track on which we have to keep. We are now going to see the effects, that this teaching, should have on our lives.

We start with verses 12 and 13: *Therefore* (that means in the light of what I've just said) *lift your drooping hands and strengthen your weak knees, make straight paths for your feet, so that what is lame may not be put out of joint but rather be healed.* You have illness, pain or trouble? Family trouble? You might know what faces you tomorrow. Perhaps you may have sharp tongues speaking against you during the week; ostracism; misunderstanding; and even persecution. It's got to be that way. We've just seen it!

But lesson 1: Don't give in to discouragement. "As I write", says the Apostle in verse 12, "you're still in the race, but only just! The going is hard. There are many difficulties. Pains are increasing. As you run this race you're on the verge of giving up!"

You've seen runners and joggers. Maybe even done it yourself. They run and run and run. But then they start to flag. The hands that were up high as they started are now hanging down. The spring in their step when they started, has given way to a sagging of the knees. Hands are drooping and the knees are sagging. They're on the point of dropping out of the race. "Lift those hands up!", says the Apostle, "straighten those knees. Take heart! Don't be ruined by trouble. I've just shown you", continues the Apostle, "That God sent the trouble - He sent it as a loving father to his child. He sent you the trouble, not to ruin you. He sent the trouble to bless you."

So don't give up just because there's trouble and difficulty. God sent that into your life, so you will be more the man or woman that you ought to be. Don't resent that trouble. Don't give up! Take it as something from God. Take courage from it – not discouragement. Lift up those hands; straightened those knees; continue with the race.

What does verse 13 mean? Imagine a runner who's about to give up. You've seen those marathon runners. They run some 26 miles, running all around the neighbourhood. It's only the last lap that's in the stadium. Sometimes when they run

that far, when they come into the stadium they can hardly keep on the track. Their hands reach towards the ground. The heads are sagging. They begin to zigzag. They are decidedly wobbly, as they go down the track. Perhaps they look as though they will wobble off the track! They find it hard to go straight anymore. "Stop it!", says the Apostle, "make straight paths for your feet, run straight ahead. This zigzag this wobbling. Stop the shuffling and limping."

Because the Hebrews were limping. They didn't know whether to go forward or back. They were faltering between two opinions. They seem to have one good leg and the other lame. Whether to go back to Judaism or make a good of the Christian life.

"If you continue like that", says the Apostle, "if you continue limping when you don't need to limp, you'll soon dislocated or sprain an ankle. Or twist it. So *make straight paths for your feet, so that what is lame may not be put out of joint but rather be healed.*"

Stop limping when you don't need to limp. Run straight ahead. And the ankle that would otherwise be put out of joint, will soon recover. You'll be OK again, you'll find you have strength from heaven to keep going.

The first practical effect of trouble, should be not to give in to discouragement.

When illness strikes you. Or perplexity. Or that problem that you never thought would happen to you – it's happened to others but now it's really happened to you. One of two things can happen. The trouble can ruin You. You can give in totally to it. You can say, "this is awful!" You can make that trouble a pretext; an excuse; and a reason for finishing with Christian things. Be bitter in your heart against God. You can give up the race and zigzag off the track. Or you can say, "My heavenly father loves me. I am his son or daughter. He's brought this hurtful experience into my life. It's not pleasant at the moment, but He did it for my good. I love Him and He loves me. He wouldn't have sent it if He hadn't loved me, and trusted me to bear it. I won't be ruined by this. Won't be discouraged by it. I'll take heart from this. Oh make it a reason for continuing in the race. Because He loves me."

Look at verse 14 for some more advice on how to greet trouble in our lives. We could give verse 14 the title: 'Sprint Forward!' Our translation begins with "strive". The Greek word used means "pursue" or even "prosecute" -- run 'flat out'. ¹⁴*Strive for peace with everyone, and for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord.*

We've all watched running races of one sort or another. In serious running races, tactics are very important. The one that runs with the pack, and doesn't seem to be doing anything special, suddenly makes a break for it, at a particular moment, and sprints forward. To leave the pack behind and win the race. So we find not just stamina, but tactics, are important. There are times to make a sprint. To sprint forward! To run harder.

When trouble comes into your life, it is such a time. God sent trouble for you to profit from it. So you should determine to do: just that!

God sent that painful experience into your life, to spur you on in the Christian life. So be spurred on! God didn't send it to ruin You, but to bless you. Not to hold you back, but to advance you. So use this trouble as an occasion, to advance.

There are two particular things to concentrate on: 1) Strive for peace with everyone. Many, perhaps most of our troubles, come to us through people. What is your experience? Has the experience of persecution been through people? Who is it that tries your patience to the limit? Persons. People. When God sends trouble into your life, this is a time to particularly concentrate on how to learn to live at peace with other people. God sent you that trial. So that in future you can get alongside people, better. So that in the future you can be more winsome. More understanding. More tolerant. More reasonable. More compassionate. More caring. More unselfish. More considerate.

2) Sometimes when you're in trouble you see things as you've never seen them before. We may be impatient with people who are in pain. Until you yourself have been in pain and then you know what it's like. Similarly we may be impatient with people who are severely deaf. Perhaps a respiratory infection may have occurred and all your ears are blocked up so you have a small taste of what a deaf person has to deal with. Such troubles make us more sympathetic with people in their troubles. And so on.

So use these times, to strive for peace with all men. When the trouble is over – if it is over in this life – you'll be a better servant for God among men and women. You'll be a better ambassador. A better soul winner. A better example. Use the trouble to learn the lesson of how to develop the quality of living in peace with all people.

So let's take another view of verse 14: ... *and for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord*. Without exception we all grieve God through the Holy Spirit. The actions we take are inspired by many motives. It's only in trouble that we are made to realise how selfish our motives can be. We have many attitudes that grieve the Holy Spirit. Many habits. Many priorities in our lives that are ungodly. Many things that we love, that we have no business to love. And things that we hate, that we have no business to hate. Many things we trust, that we have no business to trust. And many opinions that must seriously grieve the Lord of Hosts. Often in trouble, some of those things come 'home' to us. Like they've never come 'home' to us before. And we see how false our attitudes and estimates have been. How far we are from the mind of God. So many areas in our life. So through the painful experiences we often see our words and actions as others have seen them. We may have an insight of how God might have seen them. So through trouble learn to be more holy.

"So know this", says the Apostle, verse 14, "holiness isn't an optional extra, in the Christian life. Holiness is an absolute necessity. Without holiness no one will see the Lord." Unless we are advancing things Christian, we will never reach the tape.

We close by looking at verses 15 to 17: When trouble comes don't give in to discouragement. When trouble comes use it as an occasion to make further advance. To sprint forward! But always watch out for dangers along the way! The Apostle tells us in verse 15, that we're not just running this Christian life on our own. So don't just keep your eye on yourself and how well you're running, but conscientiously keep your eye on the rest of the pack. Is there anyone else in the pack who's showing signs of slowing down? Being discouraged? Zigzagging? Becoming lame and thinking of dropping out of the race? We're to look diligently – that is: see to it that no one fails to obtain the grace of God. It's not your responsibility to only keep watch on your own soul, but to keep a watch on the souls of others. It's part of the genius of the New Testament: That we are all to keep an eye on each other, spiritually. To help each other along. To keep an eye on each other. To watch over each other's spiritual progress. Don't just look at yourself. Look at the whole pack.

Now the second half of verse 15: There are thorn bushes on this course. There's one thorn which is particularly deadly. If it pricks you there will soon be an infection. Which will not only permeate you but will spread to others. A deadly infection! Which kills every time. It's called: bitterness. Bitterness against God when you have trouble. Bitterness towards others who are running with us. Bitterness because of the experiences we're facing. Bitterness! Watch out for bitterness, because if bitterness pricks you, and it's not made to heal, how will you finish the race?

"Now", says the Apostle, "forget the illustrations (verses 16 and 17) and let me just be straight with you. Once you love anything more than God's blessing, it's all up with you. Whether it's immorality or Godlessness or life without God or profanity. Make sure there's nothing like that among any of you. Make sure none of you is a person who loves something else, more than the blessing of God. Can you ask yourself that, straight away this morning. Is there anything that you love more, rather than the blessing of God?

"Think of Esau! Take warning from Esau." Says the Apostle. "He was due for a blessing. But there was something that mattered to him more. He wanted something here and now, more than what God had in line for him in the future. So he turned his back on the blessing. Just so that everything could be just as he wanted it to be: here and now. And later on he realised what he had turned his back on. But it was too late. He had crossed that invisible line that we have spoken about many times. He crossed the line of no return. No amount of remorse; no amount of tears; no amount of regret; no amount of beseeching; no amount of desire; no amount of crying could bring him back across that line again. Because he had chosen to think little of the things of God. He found himself condemned to walk along the path that he himself had chosen. He

chose to live for a while without God. Finding himself condemned to live for ever without God. That is the peril of Apostasy."

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May it please God that all present, through Jesus Christ, shall have life through His Name.