

• *A letter of warnings and encouragements*

• *A warning from Esau not to draw back*

• *The community must care for the individual*

Unbelief will block the flowing of God's grace

• *Unbelief is a weed – bitter, poisonous and fast-growing*

• *Sceptical Christians should approach the throne of grace with boldness*

Unspirituality and impurity will block the flowing of God's grace

• *Esau chose an ungodly lifestyle – despising his right to be the spiritual leader of his family*

• *A picture of a Christian who chooses spiritual carelessness – like David and Samuel*

Our pastor-friend, the author of this letter to the Hebrews, is mixing warnings and encouragements. We have good reasons to 'enter the holiest' and stay close to Jesus. There is every encouragement for us to persevere in faith and so 'run the race that is set before us'. But – says our friend – we must also refuse to draw back or become unbelieving. Our writer has said this several times^{□1}. Now he says it again using Esau as an example.

Again we note how the community must care for the individual. He says: ¹⁵*See to it that no one fails to obtain the grace of God. Let no bitter root spring up and so give you trouble. If that happens many might be defiled.* He is addressing all of the people. The entire fellowship must see that not even one of them falls or fails. 'See to it' is a plural verb.

Unbelief will block the flowing of God's grace. Our writer wants the Christians to encourage each other so much that no bitter root of unbelief springs up in any of the members of the fellowship. The wording^{□1} uses the picture of a weed whose taste is bitter and poisonous. Weeds – wild unattractive plants – tend to grow and spread faster than attractive flowers. The weed is unbelief; in Deuteronomy 29 it refers to adopting the ways of the surrounding paganism. Unbelief spreads easily – more easily than the fruit of the Spirit! So if any Christian becomes so discouraged as to speak out his scepticism it damages the entire fellowship. Our writer is assuming that this is possible. Even a sincere Christian may temporarily fall into serious scepticism, especially in a time of persecution. But a sceptical spirit does not come boldly to the throne of grace to receive grace to help in time of need. So such people fail to obtain the grace of God when they need it. Our writer is not referring to loss of status as a Christian; that is settled for ever already. He is referring to present experience and the flowing of grace into our lives. Today we need to hear God's voice – while it is called 'today'. If any one of us falls into scepticism the entire fellowship will be troubled. Many might be stained and spoiled by the unbelief of one person.

Unspirituality and impurity will block the flowing of God's grace. ¹⁶*Do not let there be any immoral person or ungodly person like Esau, who for the sake of one meal gave up his birthright – his destined inheritance as the firstborn son.* Esau is an example of the writer's point. He was within the family of Isaac, and was as much a son of Isaac as Jacob was. He was also the heir – the person destined by custom and tradition to be the spiritual leader of the family and the one with authority over its possessions. But Esau showed no interest in the family-inheritance – although he knew that the inheritance was real. Genesis 27:27–34 tells the story of how for a little bit of physical comfort he was willing to abandon his birthright. He had so little interest in it. He was interested in physical pleasure and took wives from among the pagan Hittite women^{□1}. He preferred a lifestyle that was 'ungodly' or 'profane' – disinterested in spiritual experience. When Jacob wanted the spiritual leadership of the family (though he was not a godly person either!) Esau did not care for it at all.

Here is a picture of the Christian (a member of God's family) who loses the flowing of grace in his life because of disinterest in the rewards of faith – the inheritance which God gives him both now and everlastingly. By spiritual carelessness he falls into sin. Can this happen to a true child of God? Yes! David committed adultery and murder. Samson mixed business and pleasure in a way that almost ruined his life's work.

□1 2:1–3; 3:7–4:13; 6:3–12; 10:26–31

□1 taken from Deuteronomy 29:18

□1 Genesis 26:34-35

‘Righteous Lot’ was far too attached to Sodom – of all places!

• *Esau lost his inheritance*

• *Sin blocks inheritance*

• *Although both Esau and Isaac regretted what had happened, the oath was final*

• *Sharp warning followed by encouragement*

• *Hear God’s voice!*

Esau lost his inheritance. ¹⁷*For you know that afterwards when he wanted to inherit the blessing he was rejected, for he found no place for a change of mind although he sought it with tears.* Esau’s father was very eager to give it to him. He preferred Esau above Jacob! But although the father wanted to give the inheritance to Esau, Esau’s carelessness again led him astray. When he finally wanted the inheritance it was too late. What made the inheritance to be lost to him was that Isaac took a death-bed oath. All of this illustrates the position of the neglectful and rebellious Christian. Sin blocks inheritance. Esau’s position is the rebellious Christian’s position. Oath-taking makes the inheritance to be lost without the possibility of a change. Isaac could not change his mind because he had given an oath! Esau was rejected from the possibility of the reward. The Greek word here (*apedokimasthe* from *apodokimazo*) means to reject something after scrutiny, or to reject something after testing it. The Christian is watched by God¹.

It should be noted: Esau remained within the family! Our writer is not suggesting the Christian is rejected from the family of God. And when he says Esau ‘found no place for a change of mind’ it means there was no way he or his father could do anything once the oath was given. Esau could not get Isaac to change his mind. Actually both of them regretted what had happened; both of them were full of sorrow because of Esau’s loss. But the oath was final. Esau could find no opportunity to get to where he was before the oath had been taken. For a few moments of pleasure he had started on a downward course. He had known about the inheritance and believed in the inheritance but he had not seriously wanted it. When he wanted it he could not have it because it had been given away elsewhere – by unchangeable oath.

Our writer’s sharp warning is – as always – followed by encouragement. ‘But’, he says, ‘you have not come to Sinai, the mountain where serious sin is always condemned. You have come to Mount Zion, the place where Jesus died for all manner of transgression and wickedness’¹. Let them hear God’s voice soon, before any oath of God is taken against them.

¹ see Hebrews 4:12-13

¹ 12:18-24



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