

## CHAPTER 85

### A CALL TO STEADFASTNESS

(~~85:1~~ HEBREWS 12:3, 4)

At first sight it is not easy to trace the thread which unites the passage that was last before us and the verses which are now to engage our attention: there appears to be no direct connection between the opening verses of Hebrews 12 and those which follow. But a closer examination of them shows they are intimately related: in verses 3, 4 the apostle completes the exhortation with which the chapter opens. In verse 1 the apostle borrowed a figure from the Grecian Games, namely, the marathon race, and now in verse 4 he refers to another part of those games — the contest between the gladiators in the arena.

**Second**, he had specified the principal grace required for the Christian race, namely, “Patience” or perseverance; so now in verse 3 he is urging them against faintness of mind or impatience.

**Third**, he had enforced his exhortation by bidding the saints to “look unto Jesus” their great Exemplar; so here he calls on them to “consider Him” and emulate His steadfastness.

Yet, the verses which are now before us are not a mere repetition of those immediately preceding: rather do they present another, though closely related aspect of the Christian life or “race.” In verse 1 the racers are bidden to “lay aside every weight,” and in verse 3 it is the “contradiction of sinners” which has to be endured: the former, are hindrances which proceed more from *within*; the latter, are obstacles which are encountered from *without*. In the former case, it is the evil solicitations of the flesh which would have to be resisted; in the other, it is the persecutions of the world which have to be endured. In verse 1 it is “the sin which doth so easily beset” or “encircle us” — inward depravity — which must be “laid aside”; in verse 4 it is martyrdom which must be prepared for, lest we yield to the “sin” of apostasy.

Now the secret of success, the way to victory, is the same in either case. To enable us to “lay aside” all that hinders from within, there has to be a trustful “looking unto Jesus,” and to enable us to “endure” the oppositions encountered from without and to “strive” against inconstancy and wavering in our profession, we must thoughtfully “consider Him” who was hounded and persecuted as none other ever was. As the incentive to self-denial we are to be occupied with our great Leader, and remember how much *He* “laid aside” for us — He who was rich for our sakes became poor; He who was “in the form of God” divested Himself of His robes of glory and took upon Him “the form of a servant.” *We* are not called on to do something which He did not *He* vacated the throne and took up His cross! Likewise, the chief source of comfort and encouragement when we are called upon to suffer for His sake, is to call to mind the infinitely greater sufferings which He endured for our sakes.

The more we endeavor to emulate the example which the Lord Jesus has left us, the more shall we be opposed from without; the more closely we follow Him, the greater will be the enmity of our fellow-men against us. Our lives will condemn theirs, our ways will be a perpetual rebuke to them, and they will do all they can to discourage and hinder, provoke and oppose. And the tendency of such persecution is to dishearten us, to tempt us to compromise, to ask “What is the use?” Because of this, the blessed Spirit bids us, “Consider Him that endured such contradiction of sinners against Himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds.” Let the experiences through which *Christ* passed be the subject of daily contemplation. The record of His unparalleled temptations and trials, His endurance, and His victory, is to be the grand source of our instruction, comfort and encouragement. If we have grown “faint and weary” in our minds, it is because we have failed to properly and profitably “consider Him.”

Supremely important is a knowledge of the Scriptures concerning the Lord Jesus: there can be no experimental holiness, no growth in grace apart from the same. Vital godliness consists in a practical conformity to the image of God’s Son: it is to follow the example which He has left us, to take His yoke upon us and learn of Him. For this, there must needs be an intimate knowledge of His ways, a prayerful and believing study of the record of His life, a daily reading of and meditating thereon. That is why the four Gospels are placed at the *beginning* of the N.T. — they are of first importance. What we have in the Epistles is principally an interpretation

and application of the four Gospels to the details of our walk. O that we may say with ever-deepening purpose of heart,

“I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord” (~~scribble~~Philippians 3:8).

O that we may “follow on to *know* the Lord” (~~scribble~~Hosea 6:3)

“For consider Him that endured such contradiction of sinners against Himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds. Ye have not yet resisted unto blood, striving against sin” (~~scribble~~Hebrews 12:3, 4).

The whole of this is a dehortation or caution against an evil, which if yielded to will prevent our discharge of the duty inculcated in verses 1, 2. That which is dehorted against is “be not wearied” — give not up the race, abandon not your Christian profession. The way whereby we may fall into that evil is by becoming “faint” in our minds. The means to prevent this is the diligent contemplation of our great Exemplar.

In verses 1, 2 the apostle had exhorted unto a patient or persevering pressing forward in the path of faith and obedience. In verses 3-11 he presents a number of considerations or motives to hearten us in our course, seeking particularly to counteract the enervating influence which difficulties are apt to exert upon the minds of God’s tried people. The tendency of strong and lasting opposition and persecution is to discourage, which if yielded unto leads to despair. To strengthen the hearts of those tried Hebrews, the apostle bade them consider the case of Christ Himself: *He* encountered far worse sufferings than we do, yet He patiently “endured” them (verse 3). Then they were reminded that their case was by no means desperate and extreme — they had not yet been called to suffer a death of martyrdom. Finally, their very difficulties were the loving chastisement of their Father, designed for their profit (verses 5-11). By what a variety of means does the blessed Spirit strengthen, stablish, and comfort tried believers!

Are you, dear reader, disheartened by the hard usage you are receiving from men, yea, from the religious world; are you fearful as you anticipate the persecutions which may yet attend your Christian profession; or, are you too ready to show resentment against those who oppose you? Then “*consider Him* that endured such contradiction of sinners against Himself.” The connecting “For” has the force here of “moreover:” in addition to

“looking unto Jesus” as your Leader and Perfecter, consider Him in His steadfastness under relentless persecution. Faith has many actings or forms of exercise: it is to reflect, contemplate, call to mind — God’s past ways with us, His dealings with His people of old, and particularly the recorded history of His beloved and incarnate Son. We are greatly the losers if we fail to cultivate the habit of devout consideration and holy meditation. The Greek word for “consider” is not the same as the one used in ~~scrib~~ Hebrews 3:1 and ~~scrib~~ Hebrews 10:24; in fact it is a term which occurs, in this form, nowhere else in the N.T.

The Greek word for “consider” in our text is derived from the one rendered “proportion” in ~~scrib~~ Romans 12:6. It is a mathematical term, signifying *to compute* by comparing things together in their due proportions. It means: form a just and accurate estimate. “For consider Him that endured such contradiction of sinners against Himself:” draw an analogy between *His* sufferings and *yours*, *and* what proportion is there between them! Weigh well *who* He was, the place He took, the infinite perfection of His character and deeds; and then the base ingratitude, the gross injustice, the cruel persecution He met with. Calculate and estimate the constancy of the opposition He encountered, the type of men who maligned Him, the variety and intensity of His sore trials, and the spirit of meekness and patience with which He bore them. And what are *our* trifling trials when compared with *His* agonies, or even to our *deserts*! O my soul blush with shame because of thy murmurings.

“Consider Him” in the ineffable excellency of His person. He was none other than the Lord of glory, the Beloved of the Father, the second person in the sacred Trinity, the Creator of heaven and earth. Now, since *He* suffered here on earth, why should you, having enlisted under His banner, think it strange that you should be called on to endure a little hardness in His service! Consider his *relationship* to you: He is your Redeemer and Proprietor: is it not sufficient for the disciple to be as his Master, the servant as his Lord? If the Head was spared not trial and shame, shall the members of His body complain if they be called on to have some fellowship with Him in this? When you are tempted to throw down your colors and capitulate to the Enemy, or even to murmur at your hard lot, “Consider Him” who when here “had not where to lay His head.”

The particular sufferings of Christ which are here singled out for our consideration are, the “contradiction of sinners” which He encountered. He

was opposed constantly, by word and action; He was opposed by His own people according to the flesh; He was opposed by the very ones to whom He ministered in infinite grace and loving-kindness. That opposition began at His birth, when there was no room in the inn — *He* was not wanted. It was seen again in His infancy, when Herod sought to slay Him, and His parents were forced to flee with Him into Egypt. Little else is told us in the N.T., about His early years, but there is a Messianic prophecy in <sup><19815></sup>Psalm 88:15 where we hear Him pathetically saying, “I am afflicted and ready to die from My youth up!” As soon as His public ministry commenced, and during the whole of its three years’ course, He endured one unbroken, relentless, “contradiction of sinners against Himself.”

The Lord Jesus was derided as the Prophet, mocked as the King, and treated with the utmost contempt as the Priest and Savior. He was accused of deceiving (<sup><4072></sup>John 7:12) and perverting the people (<sup><4234></sup>Luke 23:14). His teaching was opposed, and His person was insulted. Because He conversed with and befriended publicans and sinners, He was “murmured” at (<sup><4152></sup>Luke 15:2). Because He performed works of mercy on the sabbath day, He was charged with breaking the law (<sup><4082></sup>Mark 3:2). The gracious miracles which He wrought upon the sick and demon-possessed, were attributed to His being in league with the Devil (<sup><4024></sup>Matthew 12:24). He was regarded as a low-born fanatic. He was branded as a “glutton and winebibber.” He was accused of speaking against Caesar (<sup><4392></sup>John 19:12), whereas He had expressly bidden men to render unto Caesar what rightly belonged to him (<sup><4021></sup>Matthew 22:21). Though He was the Holy One of God, there was scarcely anything about Him that was not opposed.

“For consider Him who endured *such* contradiction” Here is emphasized the greatness of Christ’s sufferings: “*such* contradiction” — so bitter, so severe, so malicious, so protracted; everything which the evil wits of men and Satan could invent. That word “*such*” is also added to awaken our wonderment and worship. Though the incarnate Son of God, He was spat upon, contemptuously arrayed in a purple robe and His enemies bowed the knee before Him in mockery. They buffeted Him and smote Him on the face. They tore His back with scourgings, as was foretold by the Psalmist (<sup><4938></sup>Psalm 129:3). They condemned Him to a criminal’s death, and nailed Him to the Cross, and that, between two thieves, to add to His shame. And this, at the hands of men who, though they made a great show of sanctity, were “sinners.”

Christ *felt keenly* that “contradiction,” for He was the Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. At the end, He exclaimed “reproach hath broken My heart” (<sup><4920></sup>Psalm 69:20). Nevertheless, He turned not aside from the path of duty, still less did He abandon His mission. He fled not from His enemies, and fainted not under their merciless persecution: instead, He “*endured*” it. As we pointed out in our exposition of the previous verse, that word is used of Christ in its highest and noblest sense. He bore patiently every ignominy that was heaped upon Him. He never retaliated or reviled His traducers. He remained steadfast unto the end, and finished the work which had been given Him to do. When the supreme crises arrived, He faltered not, but “set His face as a flint to go up to Jerusalem” (<sup><2810></sup>Isaiah 50:7, <sup><4051></sup>Luke 9:51).

Do you, tried reader, feel that your cup of opposition is a little fuller than that of some of your fellow Christians? Then look away to the cup which Christ drank! Here is the Divine antidote against weariness: Christ meekly and triumphantly “endured” far, far worse than anything you are called on to suffer for His sake; yet He fainted not. When you are weary in your mind because of trials and injuries from the enemies of God, “consider” Christ, and this will quieten and suppress thy corrupt propensities to murmuring and impatience. Set *Him* before thy heart as the grand example and encouragement — example in patience, encouragement in the blessed issue: “If we suffer, we shall also reign with Him” (<sup><5012></sup>2 Timothy 2:12). Faith’s consideration of Him will work a conformity unto Him in our souls which will preserve from fainting.

“Lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds.” There is no connecting “and” in the Greek: two distinct thoughts are presented: “lest ye be wearied,” that is, so discouraged as to quit; “faint in your mind,” states the cause thereof. The word for “weary” here is a strong one: it signifies exhausted, being so despondent as to break one’s resolution. In its ultimate meaning, it refers to such a state of despondency as an utter sinking of spirit, through the difficulties, trials, opposition and persecution encountered as to “look back” (<sup><4062></sup>Luke 9:62), and either partially or wholly abandon one’s profession of the Gospel. In other words, it is another warning against apostasy. What we are cautioned against here is the opposite of that which the Lord commended in the Ephesian Church,

“And for My name’s sake hast labored, and hast not fainted”  
 (<sup><4013></sup>Revelation 2:3)

— here there *is* perseverance in the Christian profession despite all opposition.

At different periods of history God has permitted fierce opposition to break out against His people, to test the reality and strength of their attachment to Christ. This was the case with those to whom our Epistle was first addressed: they were being exposed to great trials and sufferings, temptations and privations; hence the timeliness of this exhortation, and its accompanying warning. Reproaches, losses, imprisonments, scourgings, being threatened with death, have a strong tendency to produce dejection and despair; they present a powerful temptation to give up the fight. And naught but the vigorous activity of faith will fortify the mind under religious persecution. Only as the heart is encouragingly occupied with *Christ's endurance* of the “contradiction of sinners against Himself,” will our resolution be strong to endure unto the end:

“In the world ye shall have tribulations: but be of good cheer: I have overcome the world” (~~4163~~ John 16:33).

“Faint in your minds.” This it is which, if not resisted and corrected, leads to the “weariness” or utter exhaustion of the previous clause. This faintness of mind is the reverse of vigor and cheerfulness. If, under the strong opposition and fierce persecution, we are to “endure unto the end,” then we must watch diligently against the allowance of such faintness of mind. There is a spiritual vigor required in order to perseverance in the Christian profession during times of persecution. Hence it is that we are exhorted,

“Forasmuch then as Christ hath suffered for us in the flesh, *arm yourselves likewise with the same mind*” (~~6001~~ 1 Peter 4:1);

“For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against wicked spirits in the heavenlies. *Wherefore take unto you the whole armor of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all to stand*” (~~4162~~ Ephesians 6:12, 13);

“Watch ye, stand fast in the faith, *quit you like men, be strong*” (~~4163~~ 1 Corinthians 16:13).

Any degree of faintness of mind in the Christian results from and consists in a remitting of the cheerful actions of faith in the various duties which

God has called us to discharge. Nothing but the regular exercise of *faith* keeps the soul calm and restful, patient and prayerful. If faith ceases to be operative, and our mind be left to cope with difficulties and trials in our own natural strength, then we shall soon grow weary of a *persecuted* Christian profession. Herein lies the beginning of all spiritual declension — a lack of the due exercise of faith, and that in turn, is the result of the heart growing cold toward Christ! If faith be in healthy exercise, we shall say,

“For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us”  
(~~ROM~~ Romans 8:18),

realizing that

“our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory” (~~2COR~~ 2 Corinthians 4:17);

ah, but *that* consciousness is only “*while we look not* at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen” (verse 18).

“Consider *Him*:” there is the remedy against faintness of mind; there is the preservative from such “weariness” of dejection of spirits that we are ready to throw down our weapons and throw up our hands in utter despair. It is the diligent consideration of the person of Christ, the *Object* of faith, the *Food* of faith, the *Supporter* of faith. It is by drawing an analogy between His infinitely sorer sufferings and our present hardships. It is by making application unto ourselves of what is to be found in Him suitable to our own case. Are we called on to suffer a little for Him, then let our eye be turned on Him who went before us in the same path of trial. Make a comparison between what *He* “endured” and what *you* are called to struggle with, and surely you will be ashamed to complain!

“Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus”  
(~~PHI~~ Philippians 2:5).

Admire and imitate His meekness — weeping over His enemies, and praying for His murderers!

“Ye have not yet resisted unto blood, striving against sin” (verse 4).

The persons here immediately addressed — the “ye” — were the Hebrews themselves. Because of their profession of Christianity, because of their

loyalty to Christ, they had suffered severely in various ways. Plain reference to something of what they had already been called on to endure is made in ~~<S102>~~10:32-34,

“But call to remembrance the former days, in which, after ye were illuminated, ye endured a great fight of afflictions; partly whilst ye were made a gazing-stock both by reproaches and afflictions; and partly whilst ye became companions of them that were so used. For ye had compassion of me in my bonds, and took joyfully the spoiling of your goods.”

Thus, the Hebrew saints had been sorely oppressed by their unbelieving brethren among the Jews; it is that which gave such point to the exhortation and warning in the previous verse.

“Ye have not yet resisted unto blood, striving against sin.” Here is the second consideration which the apostle pressed upon his afflicted brethren: not only to ponder the far greater opposition which their Savior encountered, but also to bear in mind that their own sufferings were not so severe as they might have been, or as possibly they would yet be. It is an argument made by reasoning from the greater to the less, and from comparing their present state with that which might await them: what could be expected to sustain their hearts and deliver from apostasy when under the supreme test of death by violence, if they fainted beneath lesser afflictions? We, too, should honestly face the same alternative: if unkind words and sneers make us waver now, how would we acquit ourselves if called on to face a martyr’s death!

The present state of the oppressed Hebrews is here expressed negatively: “ye have not yet resisted unto blood.” True, they had already met with various forms of suffering, but not yet had they been called upon to lay down their lives. As ~~<S102>~~Hebrews 10:32-34 clearly intimates, they had well acquitted themselves during the first stages of their trials, but their warfare was not yet ended. They had need to bear in mind that word of Christ, “Men ought always to pray, *and not to faint*” (~~<S101>~~Luke 18:1); and that exhortation of the Holy Spirit,

“let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, *if we faint not*” (~~<S102>~~Galatians 6:9).

“Ye have not yet resisted unto blood.” The apostle here hinted to the Hebrews what might yet have to be endured by them, namely a bloody and

violent death — by stoning, or the sword, or fire. *That* is the utmost which fiendish persecutors can afflict. Men may kill the body, but when they have done that, they can do no more. God has set bounds to their rage: none will hound or harm His people in the next world! Those who engage in the Christian profession, who serve under the banner of Christ, have no guarantee that they may not be called unto the utmost suffering of blood on account of their allegiance to him; for *that* is what His adversaries have always desired. Hence, Christ bids us to “sit down and count the cost” (<sup><4148></sup>Luke 14:28), of being His disciples. God has decreed that many, in different ages should be martyred for His own praise, the glory of Christ and the honor of the Gospel.

“Ye have not yet resisted unto blood, striving against sin.” “Sin” is here personified, regarded as a combatant which has to be overcome. The various persecutions, hardships, afflictions, difficulties of the way, in consequence of our attachment to Christ, become so many occasions and means which sin seeks to employ in order to hinder and oppose us. The Christian is called to a contest with sin. The apostle continues his allusion to the Grecian Games, changing from the racer to the combatant. The great contest is in the believer’s heart between grace and sin, the flesh and the spirit (<sup><4157></sup>Galatians 5:17). Sin seeks to quench faith and kill obedience: therefore sin is to be “striven against” for our very souls are at stake. There is no place for sloth in this deadly contest; no furloughs are granted!

“Striving against sin.” That which the Hebrews were striving against was apostasy, going to the full lengths of sin — abandoning their Christian profession. Persecution was the means which indwelling depravity sought to use, to employ in slaying faith and fidelity to Christ. That terrible wickedness was to be steadfastly resisted, by fighting against weariness in the conflict. O to say with the apostle,

“I am ready not to be bound only, but also *to die* at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus” (<sup><4213></sup>Acts 21:13):

but in order to reach *that* state of soul, there has to be a close walking with Him day by day, and a patient bearing of the minor trials.

“If thou hast run with the footmen and they have wearied thee, then how canst thou contend with horses? and if in the land of peace, wherein thou trustedst, they wearied thee, then how wilt thou do in the swelling of Jordan?” (<sup><2415></sup>Jeremiah 12:5).