

December 22 Su Reading 356 — Hebrews 12:7-17 — Disciplined for Good

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?* ⁸ *If you are left without discipline, in which all have participated, then you are illegitimate children and not sons.* 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?* ¹⁰ *For they disciplined us for a short time as it seemed best to them, but he disciplines us for our good, that we may share his holiness.* ¹¹ *For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.*

¹² *Therefore lift your drooping hands and strengthen your weak knees,* ¹³ *and make straight paths for your feet, so that what is lame may not be put out of joint but rather be healed.* ¹⁴ *Strive for peace with everyone, and for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord.* ¹⁵ *See to it that no one fails to obtain the grace of God; that no "root of bitterness" springs up and causes trouble, and by it many become defiled;* ¹⁶ *that no one is sexually immoral or unholy like Esau, who sold his birthright for a single meal.* ¹⁷ *For you know that afterward, when he desired to inherit the blessing, he was rejected, for he found no chance to repent, though he sought it with tears.*

The Value of Holiness — We see holiness in this passage from two different perspectives, first from the father, or trainer, and then from the child, or the student's point of view. The first paragraph uses the argument of lesser-to-greater. If we accept that our human fathers applied discipline "*for our good*" (v. 10), then "*much more*" should we accept being "*subject to the [heavenly] Father*" (v. 9). Human fathers discipline "*as it seemed best to them*" (v. 10a), but unlike the heavenly Father, they are not perfect. God the Father disciplines us not only "*for our good*" but also "*that we may share in his holiness*" (v. 10b). "*Holiness*" is the highest value of "*good*." The Father knows what is the greatest good for us. Do we have the same view of holiness? If so, then the second paragraph assigns our responsibility: "*Strive for ... the holiness without which no one will see the Lord*" (v. 14). To strive for it means that we are to work at becoming more holy, more sanctified, more set apart for God's purposes. Reading our Bible and praying every day is a very important part of that. Saying "No!" to temptations to sin is another way to strive for holiness. When we do sin, we must confess it to God as soon as we recognize our wrongdoing. Becoming more holy voluntarily is much more pleasant than being urged toward it through discipline.

[Lord, Make Me More Holy - YouTube](#)

Lord, make me more holy;
 Lord, make me more holy;
 Lord, make me more holy,
 until we meet again:
 Holy, holy, holy,
 until we meet again.

— African-American traditional

December 23 M Reading 357 — Revelation 14:6-13 — Judgment Has Come

⁶ *Then I saw another angel flying directly overhead, with an eternal gospel to proclaim to those who dwell on earth, to every nation and tribe and language and people.* ⁷ *And he said with a loud voice,*

"Fear God and give him glory, because the hour of his judgment has come, and worship him who made heaven and earth, the sea and the springs of water."

⁸ *Another angel, a second, followed, saying, "Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great, she who made all nations drink the wine of the passion^[fn] of her sexual immorality."*

⁹ *And another angel, a third, followed them, saying with a loud voice, "If anyone worships the beast and its image and receives a mark on his forehead or on his hand, ¹⁰ he also will drink the wine of God's wrath, poured full strength into the cup of his anger, and he will be tormented with fire and sulfur in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb. ¹¹ And the smoke of their torment goes up forever and ever, and they have no rest, day or night, these worshipers of the beast and its image, and whoever receives the mark of its name."*

¹² *Here is a call for the endurance of the saints, those who keep the commandments of God and their faith in Jesus.* ^[fn]

¹³ *And I heard a voice from heaven saying, "Write this: Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on." "Blessed indeed," says the Spirit, "that they may rest from their labors, for their deeds follow them!"*

ESV Footnotes

(14:8) Or *wrath*

(14:12) Greek *and the faith of Jesus*

Blessed Are the Dead — After announcements of judgments by three angels, the Holy Spirit speaks this positive message in the last verse: "*Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord*" (v. 14). The first angel's message was a call to worship: "*Fear God and give him glory ... worship him*" (v. 7). The second angel proclaimed a warning from the history of literal Babylon's fall in Daniel's time, the coming fall of figurative Babylon, i.e., Rome, in John's day, and the fall of perpetual human systems of rebellion against God. The third angel warned of an eternal hell for those who do not repent. Following that, John issued "*a call for the endurance of the saints*" (v. 12a), which is applicable for our day. We are to "*keep the commandments*" and keep our "*faith in Jesus*" (v. 12b) until the end of our lives. Exit in faith! That is the call for those who are to be among the "*blessed ... dead*."

Blessed Are They - YouTube

*Blessed are they that hear
the word of God, and keep it.*

— from Luke 11:28 KJV

December 24 Tu Reading 358 — Revelation 17:1-6 — The Great Prostitute

¹ *Then one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls came and said to me, "Come, I will show you the judgment of the great prostitute who is seated on many waters, ² with whom the kings of the earth have committed sexual immorality, and with the wine of whose sexual immorality the dwellers on earth have become drunk." ³ And he carried me away in the Spirit into a wilderness, and I saw a woman sitting on a scarlet beast that was full of blasphemous names, and it had seven heads and ten horns. ⁴ The woman was arrayed in purple and scarlet, and adorned with gold and jewels and pearls, holding in her hand a golden cup full of abominations and the impurities of her sexual immorality. ⁵ And on her forehead was written a name of mystery: "Babylon the great, mother of prostitutes and of*

earth's abominations." ⁶ *And I saw the woman, drunk with the blood of the saints, the blood of the martyrs of Jesus.*^[fn]

ESV Footnote

(17:6) Greek *the witnesses to Jesus*

Carried Away by the Spirit — John was seeing a vision within a vision in this paragraph. One of the seven angels in the primary vision invited John to “Come...” (v. 1) to see a further revelation, but John had no ability to move, so he had to be “*carried ... away in the Spirit*” (v. 3). God must supply the power for us to respond to any of His invitations; all He wants from us is our willingness. It was the angel who carried John away, but the Holy Spirit was the orchestrator of it all. What is the Spirit leading you to do today, that only He has the power to accomplish? Are you willing to be transported to an unknown, untried location or situation to see God work through you? Has He been urging you to help a particular person, minister to a hurting fellow believer, or share your faith with someone you have been praying for? Are you willing to let Him demonstrate His power?

[Hark, the Voice of Jesus Crying - YouTube](#)

Hark, the voice of Jesus crying,
"Who will go and work today?
Fields are white, and harvests waiting,
who will bear the sheaves away?"
Long and loud the Master calls us,
rich reward He offers free;
Who will answer, gladly saying,
"Here am I, send me, send me"?

— Daniel March (1868)

December 25 W Reading 359 — Revelation 19:6-10 — The Marriage of the Lamb

⁶ *Then I heard what seemed to be the voice of a great multitude, like the roar of many waters and like the sound of mighty peals of thunder, crying out,*

*"Hallelujah!
For the Lord our God
the Almighty reigns.*

⁷ *Let us rejoice and exult
and give him the glory,
for the marriage of the Lamb has come,
and his Bride has made herself ready;*

⁸ *it was granted her to clothe herself
with fine linen, bright and pure"—*

for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints.

⁹ *And the angel said^[fn] to me, "Write this: Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb." And he said to me, "These are the true words of God."* ¹⁰ *Then I fell down at his feet to worship him, but he said to me, "You must not do that! I am a fellow servant with you and your brothers who hold to the testimony of Jesus. Worship God." For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.*

ESV Footnote

(19:9) Greek *he said*

The Spirit of Prophecy — The marriage supper of the Lamb is heaven's formal celebration of the eternal bonding of Christ, the Lamb, with the Church, His Bride. Notice the contribution of the Bride here: "*His Bride has made herself ready ... to clothe herself with fine linen ... the righteous deeds of the saints*" (vv. 7-8). Those efforts contributed to the clothing she wore but not to the means of her getting there. She, the collective saints, was "*invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb*" (v. 9). The sacrifice of Jesus was His proposal for marriage. The RSVP came from those who were willing to become part of His Bride. This passage ends with the twice repeated, "*the testimony of Jesus*" (v. 10), which is called "*the spirit of prophecy*." In my opinion, the NIV rightly capitalizes "*Spirit*" here because, as Peter said, "*no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit*" (2 Pet. 1:21). The "*testimony of Jesus*" is the gospel, which was anticipated in the OT by prophets and revealed in the NT. It is the message we share with others, inviting them to accept Jesus' gracious proposal.

I couldn't find a video for this appropriate song:

The witness of the Holy Ghost, as borne by those who know,
Has lifted me again to Thee, O Father of my soul.
I know that Thou art in the heav'n. I know the Savior reigns.
I know a prophet speaks to us for our eternal gain.
My eyes are wet; my heart is full. The Spirit speaks today.

— Loren Charles Dunn (1985)

December 26 Th Reading 360 — Revelation 21:9-14 — The Holy City

⁹ *Then came one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls full of the seven last plagues and spoke to me, saying, "Come, I will show you the Bride, the wife of the Lamb."* ¹⁰ *And he carried me away in the Spirit to a great, high mountain, and showed me the holy city Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God,* ¹¹ *having the glory of God, its radiance like a most rare jewel, like a jasper, clear as crystal.* ¹² *It had a great, high wall, with twelve gates, and at the gates twelve angels, and on the gates the names of the twelve tribes of the sons of Israel were inscribed—* ¹³ *on the east three gates, on the north three gates, on the south three gates, and on the west three gates.* ¹⁴ *And the wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them were the twelve names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb.*

The New Jerusalem — "*Come, I will show you...*" (v. 9) are the same words used by one of the seven angels who invited John to see the judgment of the great prostitute (17:1), and in today's reading, to see "*the Bride, the wife of the Lamb*" (21:9). As before, John was carried away "*in the Spirit*" (v. 10a) to see another vision within a vision. What is a bit surprising is that, instead of seeing something that looks like a bride, John is shown a huge city, "*the holy city Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God*" (v. 10b). Earlier in this chapter, it is called both "*the holy city*" and the "*new Jerusalem*" (v. 2). It appears to be the eternal dwelling place of all the believers throughout history as symbolized by the names of the 12 tribes of Israel inscribed on the 12 gates (v. 12) and the names of the 12 apostles on the 12 foundations. Therefore, the symbol of the Bride here is unity, composed of those from every people group on earth, every skin color, and every language. How we will be able to communicate is a mystery now, but that will be easily solved in God's infinite wisdom. The new Jerusalem, the holy city, is our final home.

[I Feel Like Traveling On - YouTube](#)

My heav'nly home is bright and fair,
No pain nor death can enter there;
Its glitt'ring tow'rs the sun outshine,
That heav'nly mansion shall be mine.

I'm going home, I'm going home,
I'm going home to die no more;
To die no more; to die no more—
I'm going home to die no more.

— William Hunter (b. 1811)

December 27 F Reading 361 — Revelation 22:12-17 — I Am Coming Soon

¹² *"Behold, I am coming soon, bringing my recompense with me, to repay each one for what he has done."* ¹³ *I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end."*

¹⁴ *Blessed are those who wash their robes,^[fn] so that they may have the right to the tree of life and that they may enter the city by the gates.* ¹⁵ *Outside are the dogs and sorcerers and the sexually immoral and murderers and idolaters, and everyone who loves and practices falsehood.*

¹⁶ *"I, Jesus, have sent my angel to testify to you about these things for the churches. I am the root and the descendant of David, the bright morning star."*

¹⁷ *The Spirit and the Bride say, "Come." And let the one who hears say, "Come." And let the one who is thirsty come; let the one who desires take the water of life without price.*

ESV Footnotes

(22:14) Some manuscripts *do his commandments*

(22:21) Some manuscripts *all the saints*

Come! — This passage begins with Jesus' promise to return ("*I am coming soon*"—v. 12), and it ends with two prayerful pleas to "Come" (v. 17). Those pleas can be thought of in two ways, however. First, it could be a direct response to Jesus' promise to come, as it is three verses later: "*Surely I am coming soon. Amen. Come Lord Jesus!*" (v. 20). It seems somewhat strange to me, however, that "*The Spirit*" would also be calling for Jesus to come. The second way this call could be understood is as an invitation to unsaved people, as it seems to be in the phrase immediately following: "*And let the one who is thirsty come ... [to] take the water of life without price*" (v. 17b). In that way, it makes more sense that the Holy Spirit as well as the Church would be calling sinners to repent. Come, Lord Jesus! Come thirsty sinner!

[Come, Ye Sinners, Poor and Needy - YouTube](#)

Come, ye thirsty, come, and welcome,
God's free bounty glorify;
True belief and true repentance,
Every grace that brings you nigh.

— Joseph Hart (1759)

⁷ Remember your leaders, those who spoke to you the word of God. Consider the outcome of their way of life, and imitate their faith. ⁸ Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever. ⁹ Do not be led away by diverse and strange teachings, for it is good for the heart to be strengthened by grace, not by foods, which have not benefited those devoted to them. ¹⁰ We have an altar from which those who serve the tent^[fn] have no right to eat. ¹¹ For the bodies of those animals whose blood is brought into the holy places by the high priest as a sacrifice for sin are burned outside the camp. ¹² So Jesus also suffered outside the gate in order to sanctify the people through his own blood. ¹³ Therefore let us go to him outside the camp and bear the reproach he endured. ¹⁴ For here we have no lasting city, but we seek the city that is to come. ¹⁵ Through him then let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that acknowledge his name. ¹⁶ Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God.

ESV Footnote

(13:10) Or *tabernacle*

Sanctified Through Blood — This passage is filled with comparisons and contrasts between the old and new covenants. Holiness is one of the themes, using the Greek adjective for the “*holy places*” within the tabernacle or temple (v. 11), and also using the verb form of the same word, “*to sanctify*” (v. 12). In contrast to the blood of animals brought into the “*holy places*,” is the blood of Jesus shed “*outside the gate*” (v. 12), transferring the focus of sacrifice from lambs to the Lamb and broadening the location of worship from the tabernacle or temple to the world. The “*sacrifice for sin*” in verse 11 was offered once a year on the Day of Atonement, whereas the sacrifice of Jesus was offered once for all time. Then, in a different way, there is our “*sacrifice of praise*,” which we “*continually offer*” (v. 15) in grateful response for what God has done for us. Also viewed as our sacrifice in verse 16 is for us “*to do good*,” in general, and “*to share what you have*,” in particular. Our sacrifices to God are to be those of praise and generosity.

Awake, My Soul, and With the Sun - YouTube

Awake, my soul, and with the sun
Thy daily stage of duty run;
Shake off dull sloth, and early rise
To pay thy morning sacrifice.

Praise God, from whom all blessings flow;
Praise Him all creatures here below;
Praise Him above, ye heav'nly host;
Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.

— Thomas Ken (1695)