

THE SERMONS, LECTURES, AND SONGS OF SIDNEY EDWARD COX

Epistle to the Hebrews - Chapter 12 (Continued)

Editorial Note: This is a lecture by Sidney Cox that was part of a series of lectures on the Epistle to the Hebrews that he taught while on the theological teaching faculty at the Toccoa Falls Bible Institute during the early part of 1962. He was 75 years of age at the time.

During the latter part of his life, Sidney Cox had developed a close relationship with the Christian and Missionary Alliance (“CMA”). CMA operates as a vast network of churches, similar to a “denomination.” Toccoa Falls Bible Institute was closely affiliated with the CMA, provided support to the Institute and the Institute sent many of its graduates into ministry within CMA churches. CMA and The Salvation Army, in which Sidney Cox served as an officer for 30 years previously in his life, share a similar theology and emphasis in Christian outreach.

From 1956 – 1960, Sidney and Violet Cox lived in Miami, Florida where Sidney was on the theological teaching faculty of the Miami Bible Institute, another CMA supported institution. They moved to Toccoa Falls, Georgia in 1960, where he served on the staff at the Toccoa Falls Bible Institute from 1960 – 1962.

As a lecture, he was obviously assuming that his students had prepared for class by reading and studying the pertinent scripture and other class material. Thus, his comments were not like a sermon, but lectures to enhance the students’ theological understanding. He emphasized a detailed study of the scripture and incorporated analysis that he gained from his study of Bible commentaries and books on the related subject matter. These lectures are remarkably free of any personal opinions, personal illustrations or “sermonizing” of any kind. While at other times in his career he was very much the preacher and evangelist, in these late-in-life roles of Bible Professor, he was very much the educator.

John Douglas Cox, grandson of Sidney Cox. December 29, 2008.

...I think rightly so as the practical part of our study together. One is doctrinal and the other is practical. And we know in what sense we use those words. Although I think we should avoid thinking that doctrine is not practical, that is, it’s theory only. It isn't at all. Doctrine is life, out of which practice comes. And I think we should, in our thinking, be quite sure that we do not put an interpretation on the word doctrine that was never intended to be there and isn't there either. Because when we speak of one part as being doctrinal and the other practical, we'd better not separate them too closely and too distinctly. We do it for our sake, of course, we know what we're after. We're studying one thing as the ground out of which a tree grows. The ground is doctrine and the tree is the practical life that issues from it. That's the main thing that we are endeavoring to see.

In this practical part of it, we began in the 11th chapter, to watch this wonderful thing of the, “Role call of faith.” These old worthies of the day that had gone who, right from the beginning of things, were marked by one thing – faith. And we'd better remember that while it is true that we're looking at their faithfulness, we are not merely looking at their faithfulness, but we are looking beyond that to the

faithfulness of someone else. Because the only faithfulness that Abraham had was the faithfulness that had --- something of yourself. It is the gift of God. Now, let us keep that in mind.

But it would be of tremendous help and inspiration to these old Hebrews to whom this letter was being written to remember, these were our people. But don't forget that the letter was not merely written to somebody who could say, "Abraham was my father," but it was written for the benefit of those of us who could not say that, because on this side of it, we are, as well. And we see ourselves in the Epistles to the Hebrews. And one of the values that's bound to come out of a study like this is not merely that you see somebody who lived years before, but that you can see yourself in it as well. It has something definitely to say to us. And that's the value of it, of course.

When we got into the 12th chapter, we began to see a little more of this walk that we had seen, and it becomes a run, a race, in the 12th chapter. And the thing that we, or in the 11th chapter. And we can see a good many things here up in the 12th chapter, excuse me. But we can see a good many things here that apply to us. "We run with patience the race that is set before us."¹ And remember, that it was the Apostle Paul, when you're thinking about the authorship of this particular book, who said more about a race than anybody else who wrote in the New Testament times. He was the one who constantly emphasized and stressed such things as, "The race that is set before us." We simply remind ourselves of it, that's all. But it's just as well to keep it in mind when you're pondering the question, who wrote the Epistle to the Hebrews. You will still be pondering it when you get through with that, but it may help in some way.

Then we get into the 12th chapter and we find something else that is of tremendous importance, and it's this – that a race is not solely something that we do, but that there is something of tremendous importance connected with it. And that is, what we are. Now, when a person is running a race in an ordinary track meet, for example, it isn't a matter of primary importance what that person is in his own personal character and life. He may be a rascal in his personal character and life, but if he can run the 100 yard dash in 9.4, he's somebody, regardless of who he may be in his character. That's what we're looking at in the ordinary race. But this is entirely different. It's not merely a matter of what we do, it's a matter of what we are, as well. And the important point of the race is not a matter of just the mechanics of it as we are going along, but what kind of person we are. And so you find in this 12th chapter the emphasis is on what kind of a person we are.

And you will find, particularly in the last part of the chapter, and you can find it, of course, in the beginning of it, but in the last part of the chapter you find the emphasis is on, not merely speed or even success in the race. The emphasis is on the beauty of holiness. Now, that's the thing that is there. It doesn't matter what the average athlete is in himself. But for us, it does. This is the important thing. And so we find the record of the race and the inspiration of it and the main factor of it as being faith, and so on.

But when we get into the 12th chapter we find this important matter of the kind of person who is running the race. And we've got to remember that the one who stands at the finishing line to give out and to present the awards of the race is far more interested in what we are than what we do. Now, that's the point about the 12th chapter of Hebrews. It's what we are, not merely what we do. In our notes, and I'm hoping again that you will see something of value and be able to use some of these things, in that first

1 Hebrews 12:1

part of the chapter we mentioned these things. That the race is described in seven ways: the fact of it – that it is a relay race, the witnesses, the goal, the crowning day, the motive, the reward, the great example that is there. Jesus is the pattern of our faith, the glory of the goal.

And then we saw again the great attraction of the race is that we find ourselves in the presence of one who is the illuminating glory of heaven. And you find that mentioned four times in here. Not merely a matter of a race, not merely a matter of an award. When you get to the end of an ordinary race or an ordinary contest and somebody gives out an award, it isn't of too much importance who that person is or what kind of a person he is. That's not the point. What we're after is the award. But when we get to the end of this race the important thing is, not the award, but the one who presents it. That's the difference between this race and the others that we are so familiar with. And you find His glory is mentioned as being, "That at the right hand of the majesty on high," four times, where the emphasis is on Him at the end of the race. Not you as having accomplished something, but how glorious to find ourselves in His presence.

The one whose absence must have, and we hesitate, of course, about using phrases like this, but it must have darkened Heaven when He left. And it must have illuminated it beyond expression when He arrived back home again. And we stand now in the presence of this one. Now, that's the glory at the end of the race. Not the fact that He may award us something that we speak of in our phraseology as a crown. That's an entirely secondary thing. But to find ourselves intimately in His presence and to see the look upon His face of satisfaction as we stand before Him again. Now, that's the point about it all.

It's quite different to an ordinary race. A person runs a race, gets a cup at the end of it there. It doesn't matter that much who gives the cup. The cup is everything, but in this race it isn't that way at all. It isn't the crown that matters, it's the one who gives it that matters. He's the one. And it's an entirely different thing in this race. Now, having said that, and having gone through that, when being told to consider Him, that's the reason why we're told to consider Him. Not to consider our crown. It doesn't tell us anywhere that we're to stop and spend time admiring the crown and putting it on and saying, "Isn't this something now. And I've won this." Oh, no, not at all. It's entirely different to that. We're told to consider Him and to take a good long look at Him. And if you can see the look of satisfaction and delight upon His face when we finish the race, that will be our award for all eternity. That will be something, my dear, that you will never get over, never. It'll last for all eternity. And the wonder of it is, we can catch some reflection of it now. We don't need to wait to see all of it. We can catch a little bit of it even now.

Now, having said that, the next part of this chapter has to do with what we are, the beauty of holiness, and this, of course, is the main thing about it there. Now, we mentioned a few things and I want to stop and come to one or two others and spend a little time on them this morning.

First of all, there were five helps to holiness. I believe you made a note of these as we were going along - the attraction of our glorified Lord, the encouragement of the cloud of witnesses, the urgent necessity because of the danger of the besetting sin. We shall pause a moment at that point. The help that is given to us in the chastening of the Father, and the danger of missing God's best. Now, that's the point where we need to stop and spend a little time this morning, because there is a grave misunderstanding right at that point. What is the danger of missing God's best? What do we mean by that? Now, we'll stop a little while at that point as we go along.

We need to watch and pray because of this besetting sin. And by the way, when you preach on that text, “The sin that doth so easily beset us”², the words you need to underscore is, “Easily”. Be sure that you put your mark under that. It “easily” besets us. Now don't forget, that dangers have been set before us all the way through this book. For instance, one of the dangers that we met right at the beginning of the Epistle to the Hebrews was the danger of what? The very first danger that we saw? The danger of what? (audience responds) Of drifting, that's right. The danger of drifting. And then the drifting led to what? To neglect, exactly so. Now, you see the easy pathway there? The easiest thing we do is drift. And in the drifting, the easiest thing we do after that is to neglect. The easy thing.

But see what it leads to. Now, here is a sin that, “Doth so easily beset us,” because it has to do with two things that we have just mentioned – drifting and neglect. Now, of course, it has to do with the fact that we fail to put aside the weights that are there. And weights, as we have reminded each other, have in their nature the possibility, the inevitability, that they will multiply. One weight becomes two weights. One part of our equipment hindered by a weight will very soon become another part hindered by a weight. These weights multiply, and unless we put them aside, a dreadful thing happens.

Now, I want you to keep in mind what we said a few minutes ago, that the important point about this race is the look on His face at the end of it. Now, that's the important thing about it. It's not how well you did, because you didn't do well at all. You wouldn't do anything apart from the grace that He gave you. It wasn't how well we did; how skillfully we ran the race, not at all. That is not the point. There at the end of it, we find ourselves standing, facing Him. He is the important thing. The glory in His face, that's the important thing. And, the danger of weights and the danger of neglect is not merely that it hinders us from doing something, but it beclouds His face. Now, that's the danger of it. When weights, hindrances, are allowed to continue and that allowing of them to continue becomes sin, then the cloud comes between us and Him. And we only see Him indistinctly.

Now, let me ask you something, my dear. And we can talk to each other quite frankly in a room like this. I don't know what happened in that life of yours when sometime ago, I wouldn't like to say this morning, but let's say at some time ago there came a cloud between you and your Lord. And you didn't see him as clearly as you should have done. Do you remember? It wasn't a very comfortable time, was it? Where you saw him indistinctly. Do you know what caused it? Oh, you could put your finger on some particular thing. But the general cause of it was, there was something there that needed to be dealt with. And we didn't deal with it. And it got bigger and bigger and it became more and more difficult to deal with it and the result was, a cloud between you and your Lord. Now, if there is one thing that will hinder us in our Christian race, it's that. It's not merely a matter of a weight upon our feet. That's bad enough. It's not merely a matter of a weight upon our hands. That's bad enough. But if there's anything that makes Him indistinct, then that's the tragedy. That's the tragedy.

And that's the thing that this writer wants these dear saints of God to avoid. He doesn't want something to come into their lives that will not just hinder their speed or their effectiveness in what they do, but will becloud His face. Now, that's the thing he's wanting them to avoid, because it can come so easily. We don't have very much to do with clouds that arise in the natural sky. And we know quite well that clouds can arise in the spiritual sky and we can be aware of them almost before we know they're there at all. And suddenly, here they are. And if you trace it back, it's nearly always, if not always, traced back

2 Hebrews 12:1

to something that should have been set aside but it was allowed to remain. And it doesn't take much to do that, to cause a cloud in the sky and then through that you see your Lord indistinctly. Now, that's the danger that's here.

It's not merely a matter of laying aside a weight that will prevent us from running. Of course, it will prevent us from running. Prevent us from doing something. But the grave danger is, it becomes a cloud between ourselves and His face. And your only place of safety and effectiveness, my dear, is to stay in a position where His face is quite clear all the way through. You don't amount to much if His face ever becomes clouded.

Now, that's the thing that he's saying. And one of the things that will help us in this matter of keeping our vision clear, so that nothing comes between us and Him; we see Him clearly; one of the ways in which our heavenly Father assists us with that is to spank us sometimes. Did you catch it? Now, of course, you can call that, you won't find that word in the scripture, but you will find the equivalent of it a good many times. For instance, you will find it as chastening, and you will find it as testing. You will find it under the general thought of discipline. Now, you won't find the word discipline there, but you will find chastening and testing. But the thought of discipline all the way through. And we don't like it sometimes. Discipline is, even God's discipline is something that causes us to rebel sometimes. That's one of the easy things again.

Now, don't forget that this word chastening has in it, and you will find this in your notes, the thought of child training. Discipline is an essential part of child training. Now, here it is before us, and it has two purposes. Now, both of these words are in your notes. But I would suggest that you underscore them. One is correction and the other is strengthening.

Now, let's go to a common-place scene in a common-place home. And here is something that has happened that is contrary to the rules of the home, and the boy has been responsible for it. Now, chastening is a necessity. And chastening takes place. But the wise chastener, whether he be father or mother, does it with two things in mind. And if either of these things are overlooked, and it can be overlooked, I'll tell you why and how in just a minute, but these two things must be kept in mind. One, to show the boy where he was wrong. And two, to strengthen him so that he won't make the same mistake the second time. Now, unless that is accomplished in chastening, it becomes a useless thing and very frequently it can be a harmful thing. Because quite frequently, parents chastise children just to relieve their own feelings. And when that happens that's a tragedy. That's a tragedy when chastening is done just to relieve the chastener's feelings. He became irritated about this and consequently there must be chastening and it's a relief to him. Now, when that happens, then chastening can be a curse instead of a blessing.

But you never find that with God, never. He's doing the chastening, you see. And he always does it with this thought: to point out to us where we were wrong and to strengthen us so that we will not make the same mistake again. Now, that's the point about chastening. And that is the thing that makes it, not grievous, but joyous - when you can see what God is doing through it all. Now, that's the thing this man wanted these people to know because they were going to be chastened, of course. There were going to be lots of things that would be happening there. It could be the greatest blessing, the greatest help, on this road - the making of them into what they ought to be. This process of chastening. Now, it's a mark of something. It's a mark that we are sons and not aliens.

When God chastens us, it's a mark that we belong to him and that we are not outsiders at all. We belong to him. "Whom the Lord loveth, he chasteneth."³ Now, that's exactly the case with a parent in a home - whom the parent loveth, he chasteneth. And you will nearly always find connected with chastening, this. "Now, I don't want you to do that again. I don't want you to do that anymore. Now, it's been dealt with. You did the thing that was wrong. We've done the thing that we ought to do and you've been chastened because you did a thing that's wrong. But I don't want you to do that anymore." And it's nearly always followed with that, isn't it? We nearly always add that. I don't want you to do that anymore. And if chastening is because of a fault in us, our heavenly Father says, "Not only I don't want you to do it anymore, but I'm going to trust you not to do it anymore." See? Now, that's chastening. And you will find it right in here.

Now, the danger that is mentioned here is the danger of missing God's best. Now, let's have a look at that for just a minute, because here is the point as I indicated some time ago where we can get quite confused about it. For instance, we sometimes interpret, missing God's best, in terms of what kind of a job we are handling. For instance, if a preacher is a preacher of a big church and something happens in his life, and he has to be, shall we say, demoted until he comes down to a second or third rate church. And we say, "He's missed God's best." Well, now there may be some truth about that, but that's not the thing that's here at all.

Don't forget, that God's best is not what God gives us to do, but it's God himself, He's the best. He's the best. Now, you connect that with what we were saying a few moments ago about something coming that will becloud his face. The best thing that God ever gives us is Himself, not a job to do, not a work to do. The best thing he gives us is Himself. Now, if anything hinders that, if anything stops that, then that is the losing of the best, because the best is the unclouded look into the face of God. That's the best. There isn't anything like that either in time or eternity. And if we lose God's best it means something has come that makes him indistinct.

Now you apply that. Just look around you. You preach your own sermon on that. Look around you. What's wrong with these folks that are living a second or third or fourth rate Christian life? What's wrong with them? Well, now you can find the answer in a dozen ways, but the essential, central thing is, their vision of God has become beclouded. They have an indistinct vision of God. That's wrong. That's what's wrong. When the vision of your Father is clear before your eyes, everything else just takes care of itself. There's no kind of a second rate life as long as he is first and clear all the way through. Now, that's losing God's best. It's allowing something to come so that the vision splendid becomes an indistinct, beclouded, unsatisfactory thing.

And the danger of it, my dear, is the danger of allowing that thing to go on until we become satisfied with it. And we don't want anything else. Let me say something else that may sound rather hard, but you will know at once that it's quite true. There are any number of folks who are living second, third, fourth, fifth rate Christian lives, who don't want to do anything else. They have become satisfied, settled in it. If they saw a clear vision of God, they would be very much disturbed. And they don't want it. Now, there may have been a moment when they wanted it, but something has come, perhaps without them being aware of it. It slipped in so easily. It so easily beset them and there it has taken up a place that has become almost permanent between themselves and God. And there are lots of folks like that.

3 Hebrews 12:6

And that's the danger, the danger of being satisfied with a second class life, the danger of being satisfied with being a second class Christian. Now, that's the danger. And this man didn't want them to be getting into that fix at all, because it's tragedy when that is so. It's tragedy when that is so.

And he says, don't forget, that without holiness, no man shall see the Lord. Now, don't forget that the word holiness and the thought that's implied there has nothing to do with the future. It has everything to do with the present. It isn't saying that unless you've got a second or a third blessing or something of the kind, you are not going to be able to see God at the end of the road, and there are lots of folks who interpret it that way. I labored under that for years till God in his grace delivered me. That's what I thought, that unless I'd got some fantastic blessing or other, call it what you like, that I wasn't going to be able to see God at the end of the road. That isn't what it has meant at all. It isn't the end of the road that's in view, it's right now. It's right now. Without holiness, I'm not going to be able to see him. If I allow something in my life that is unlike him, and after all, my dear, holiness is God likeness.

Now, I know that you can say a lot more about it when you talk about it theologically. And we ought to say more about it, but essentially, holiness is simply God likeness. It's being like him, that's all. Now, if something comes that hinders us from being like him right now, never mind about the end of it, then the result is this something that is unlike him that we allow in our lives. How easily it comes up like a cloud between ourselves and Him and without holiness, we cannot see him clearly. And he's talking about it now, not in the future at all. Not the future tense, right now. Right now. You allow these things to come in your life, this writer is saying to these Hebrew Christians, "And it will becloud your vision of God. And when that happens, then impotence comes." Of course. Now, that's what he's saying.

Without holiness, no man shall see the Lord. And there are lots of folks that are stumbling down the road. Oh yes, they're on their way to Heaven, and they'll probably get there. It isn't our business to say they won't get there. And it isn't our business to say they're not Christians. Whatever we may think about it, we'd better be careful about labeling somebody not a Christian. We'd better be right careful about that. We're just wise when we soft peddle that kind of thing. But we know this, that when something comes between the life and God, then you find somebody stumbling around down the road, impotent, fruitless. They may arrive at a destination. They may be saved so as by fire, but the steps along the road are stumbling, blundering things because the vision has become beclouded. That's what he's talking about here. Without holiness, you can't see the Lord.

And if something comes up between us that is unlike Him, shuts out the vision so that we can't see it, what are we going to do? What are we going to do? What would you do between now and noon if you couldn't see your Father's face? What would you do, my dear? What? It doesn't take long to get into difficulty, does it? It doesn't take long to get into difficulty if anything beclouds your Father's face and it can happen so very easily. That's the reason why, in this chapter, you find things all connected with this, such as words like this in verse fifteen, you've got them there in your notes, "Lest any man fail"⁴ – fail of what? Not merely failed to do something. Not merely failed in an accomplishment. But fail in this way – to walk the road with the clear shining of God's face upon him, because he can't see it. He's indistinct. He only sees God like men of trees walking. His spiritual glasses haven't been cleaned and they need it. They sure do. They surely do. It doesn't take long to get your glasses beclouded. You've got to watch it all the time, you sure have. And when we look at God we've got to see that there isn't anything between us and God.

4 Hebrews 12:15

“Lest any man fail, lest there should be a root of bitterness.”⁵ And a root of bitterness is something that is unlike God that we have allowed in our lives until it becomes a subtle thing. And sometimes, in order to get it out, God has to perform a major operation. It could have been cleansed right quick, but when it's allowed to stay there until it takes root in our lives, then God has to perform a major operation. And sometimes he does. He sometimes does.

“Lest any become a fornicator.”⁶ And one of the easiest things to do, and don't forget the meaning of that – it's an unlawful connection with the things that are unlike God; that's what fornication means. An unlawful connection with things that do not belong to God. That's what it means. And one of the things that happens, it happens almost inevitably, when you get the vision beclouded by something that has not been dealt with, then it's so easy, isn't it, for us to make a connection with the things of the world as we talk about them. And whenever you find a Christian who has a leaning toward the things of the world always, committing an unlawful, illegal act with the things and people of the world, whenever you find that, that's what fornication is. Whenever you find that, you can be quite sure you're looking at somebody who's vision of God has become beclouded. And it always happens.

You take those three things, they're all part of one thing. Lest we fail – fail of what? Not merely fail to do some little bit of a task. God can get on without that. Not merely fail in the matter of dealing with something until it becomes rooted inside. And how difficult it is to deal with it then. And then it always leads to an unlawful, illegal, disloyal connection with the things of the world. It always leads to it. And you've got these things that are here.

Now, this desirable thing we are told is to be followed. We are to follow after this. We should make it the one business of our lives to see to it that the path that leads to the face of God is unhindered by weights. It should be the biggest task in our lives, to be watching carefully all the way along and clearing out of the way the things that would blur the vision of God. It's to be followed. “Follow holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord.”⁷ Follow holiness, because if you don't, things will come between you and God that will make the vision indistinct and your progress unsatisfactory and will put things into your life that in order to get rid of them, God may have to perform a major operation. If you want to see that major operation described, read what God had to do with some of the folks who were in the church in Corinth. And they allowed things to come and to settle down and to become rooted until God had to perform a major operation.

Now, this is the thought that is here and at the end of it, there's lots more in it, of course. I've only just touched the fringe of it. Now, there's a lot more of it, as if the writer is saying, “By the way, when I was talking to you some way back there, I was telling you how much better Christianity is than Judaism. And maybe in these things that we've been talking about, we may have forgotten that. But I would like to remind you about it again,” he says. And so he does.

And at the end of the 12th chapter, you will find again this wonderful contrast between Judaism on the one side and Christianity on the other. And the more you think about the light in the face of your Father, the more wonderful these things become. You listen to the difference. Here's the summary of it.

⁵ Hebrews 12:15

⁶ Hebrews 12:16

⁷ Hebrews 12:14

You've got it there in your notes - verse 18, the old things there: Mount Sinai, fire and blackness and darkness and tempest and trumpet and the voice of words. And by the way that's the Ten Commandments if you want to know what voice of words means- and there was fear and trembling and all the rest of it. We've been delivered from that. And now, we have a new covenant in the city of the living God and the innumerable company of angels and the assembly and church of the first born. And God is the judge of all, and the spirits of just men made perfect, and Jesus the mediator of the new covenant, and the blood of sprinkling - notice one thing about that...there is one addition in the number of the things that are mentioned. There is one additional number in the glories of the new, as against the old. In the old, seven. In the new, eight. The blood of sprinkling. And don't forget, that's the crown of it all. For sprinkling by the blood means it's God's sign of his eternal relationship with us. It belongs to God.

I think I've told you there the story that – don't know whether we have time for this - the story of, that was told to me by the very gracious lady who was connected with the Bowen Biblical Museum at Bob Jones University, and who spent so many years of her life in Palestine, gathering together this stuff, and then writing the books. By the way, if you want a book that'll thrill your heart on Palestine customs, and bring unending delight and light in your study of the Word of God, you check on a little book that has a long title; it is called, *Scriptures that Perplex the Western Mind*, by Barbara Bowen. *Scriptures that Perplex the Western Mind*. And she's taken a lot of these things and just brought them over into our language, and it's amazing what light there is there. But she told us one time about this matter of sprinkling. She said she'd done a service for a Hebrew family, and they were very grateful. And one day, she went there and they sprinkled her with rose water, and when she asked why, they said, "That's the sign that our friendship is unbreakable." When God sprinkles us with blood, our relationship is an unbreakable one.

Alright? (lady asks question in audience) Beg your pardon? Barbara Bowen. Dr. Barbara Bowen. B-O...

(audio ends)