

Hebrews 12:14 "Make Every Effort To Live At Peace With All Men And To Be Holy"

When we look at a letter like Hebrews what we don't want to miss is that this is a letter about life, real life in a real world. There's the tendency to study the Bible simply as some spiritual exercise to gain knowledge and then we miss out entirely on the fact that this is God speaking to us.

He has saved us from the penalty of our sin through faith in Christ, but He has not taken us out of this world yet. We remain here to be His witnesses. But He wants the kind of witnesses who faithfully seek Him and follow Him as we love Him. And so, during our pilgrimage He will use this life to sharpen us in a way where we not only represent Him but are used by Him to minister to others.

Last week we saw how our Lord uses circumstances in life to discipline us and in that discipline He disciplines us. But He wants us to always have the proper perspective on discipline so that we don't grow weary and lose heart. When we understand the purpose in the way He deals with us, we can begin to have a change of heart toward life when it's not so pleasant.

When we see His loving hand guiding us and conforming us into the image of His Son we can begin to see with spiritual eyes how much He really loves us. But it's important not to equate trials and tribulations in our lives with God pouring out His wrath on us.

We're told in ROM 5:8-9 "But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. 9 Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him!"

Paul also tells us in 1TH 5:9 "For God did not appoint us to suffer wrath but to receive salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ."

And so, when the heat is turned up in our lives and God is trying to bring the dross to the surface to be taken away we must never think that God is hating us, as He allows these things to happen, rather He is loving us and using all of life to make sure His children in Christ come through to honor and glorify Himself in our lives.

This doesn't mean that the testings and the trials are things we look forward to or even embrace as a long lost friend. But we should

see them for what they are; opportunities to grow in Christ. It's God's way of letting us know class is in session. In this we rejoice to know that He is personally involved in tutoring us Himself. That special attention is nothing we should despise.

He is fully aware that we are frail and weak at times in our lives and that the testing may not be pleasant, but He loves us too much not to do all that needs to be done so that we grow closer to Him and become more like Him.

And that's why our writer said in our text last week:

HEB 12:11-13 "No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it. 12 Therefore, strengthen your feeble arms and weak knees. 13 "Make level paths for your feet," (Prov. 4:26) so that the lame may not be disabled, but rather healed."

But to simply endure the hardship and the testing is not what enables us to grow. Anyone can grit their teeth and simply receive what comes their way. In fact, if this is the attitude we take we might find that instead of growing closer to Christ, in the face of trials, we push ourselves further away.

God is not asking us to be whipping posts. Rather He is saying we must go beyond the trial and see how God wants us to shine through it to His glory. And so we come to our text this morning.

HEB 12:14 "Make every effort to live in peace with all men and to be holy; without holiness no one will see the Lord."

You'll notice in verse 14 that our writer says to "make every effort to live in peace with all men and to be holy".

In today's world, if effort has to be put forward, people would rather back up or flee until the obstacle is gone. But God will often not take the obstacle away. He will pursue us until we see that to follow Him by faith is the only solution. Jonah learned this when he did everything humanly possible to flee from God's will. But the Lord loved Jonah enough to keep the heat up until Jonah submitted and God's will was accomplished in the Gospel being brought to Ninevah.

You and I live in a world where it's easier to flee from circumstances and people instead of making the effort to go forward with God. When our writer says to, "Make every effort to

live in peace with all men and to be holy", he is saying this right on the heels of encouraging God's people to "strengthen the hands that are weak and the knees that are feeble."

A decision to make the effort must come into play. But the effort is not our strength being employed, rather it is Christ's strength in us as we seek Him diligently, relying on His almighty power.

The Greek word used by our writer here in verse 14 for "make every effort", as the NIV puts it, could also be translated "pursue earnestly", and it conveys the idea of a hunter who tracks down his prey without giving up until he finally brings it down.

These Hebrew Christians had to contend with all sorts of ridicule and trials at the hands of unbelievers. They were certainly mocked for their faith in Christ. If you've ever had anyone get in your face and call you a blithering idiot for believing such nonsense as the Bible, your first reaction might be to apply a holy head-lock and twist vigorously.

We may be tempted to go toe to toe in a verbal contest or show that side of our old nature from which we're told Christ redeemed us. Or, like Jonah, we may simply flee and have nothing to do with trying to show the love of Christ in that situation.

To pursue after peace with all men means just that, all men, not just the brethren. In other words, those people in the world who are still of the world and have no relationship with Christ.

You mean to say that I'm to pursue after peace with my no good, back-stabbing, two-faced boss, or in-laws or you fill in the blank? That is certainly what is implied. That does not mean that they will always reciprocate. But God has called us to peace. He has called us to be peace-makers. And again, this has nothing to do with being door-mats.

It simply has to do with being Christ's ambassador. He tells us to love our enemies and pray for them. And so we don't want to be the kind of believers who are stirring up strife with people in this world, looking for a fight because we think we're better than them, or that they deserve to be treated with contempt.

It's true that Paul says in ROM 12:18-19 "If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. 19 Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: "It is mine to avenge; I will repay," says the Lord." (Deut. 32:35)

At this point we're usually more than willing to pray that God will be vengeful and pay that person a visit. Get 'em God!, as though we have some sort of spiritual pit-bull on a leash. No, this is not being a person of peace. In fact, Paul continued in the next verse by saying, "On the contrary: "If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head. Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good." (Rom.12:20-21)

Once more it must be said that those people may not want to live in a peaceful coexistence with us, but at least we've done everything we can to honor Christ and through it all we can grow in that grace He bestows on us to be peace-makers.

The Kingdom of God is characterized as one of peace. In Hebrews 13:20 our Lord is called the "God of Peace". In Isaiah 9:6 is where we see that Jesus Christ is referred to as the "Prince of Peace." In Luke 10:6 believers are called the "sons of peace", and every believer is encouraged in Ephesians 6:15, to have their "feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace."

Peace is not some buzz-word which came out of the 60's. It's a quality of life that only a believer can possess after having come into a peaceful relationship with the Father through the shed blood of Christ, but that quality of life eternal is extended to the world in truth and love.

One last thing I want to mention here and that is if we have been called upon to be at peace with all men, how much more with fellow-believers.

MAR 9:50 "Salt is good, but if it loses its saltiness, how can you make it salty again? Have salt in yourselves, and be at peace with each other."

Paul says in 2TI 2:22 "Flee the evil desires of youth, and pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace, along with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart."

This brings us to the next part of our text.

HEB 12:14 "Make every effort to live in peace with all men **and to be holy**; without holiness no one will see the Lord."

There is a trend in the Church today to pursue peace at any price. And though it is essential that peace with all men, including believers, be a priority, it must never be at the expense of truth and

holiness which comes from following the truth and the Spirit who empowers us in that truth.

Holiness is that working of God in our lives where we are set apart to do that which pleases Him as we are enabled to live holy lives in the power of His Spirit.

ROM 6:19,22, "I put this in human terms because you are weak in your natural selves. Just as you used to offer the parts of your body in slavery to impurity and to ever-increasing wickedness, so now offer them in slavery to righteousness leading to holiness. 22 But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves to God, the benefit you reap leads to holiness, and the result is eternal life."

The word holiness used in Heb.12:14 could also be translated sanctification. And so the idea here is that each one of us in Christ are called upon to grow in Christ in such a way that we reflect His holy character in our lives.

Our Lord Jesus touches on this in MAT 5:48 "Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect."

The word perfect here means complete in all things, which would of course include being holy, set apart for a Godly work.

Of course our heavenly Father's holiness is perfect in all ways. And though we can never be perfect in this life we are still called upon to live in a way that honors Him and shows the world that He is working in us and promising us that we will one day be perfectly holy in glory with Him.

But holiness must never be divorced from the truth and the true spiritual peace it brings. We must never compromise by trying to meld all teachings together even when they do not line up with the Word of God, for the sake of peace and unity.

It seems these days that anyone who names the name of Christ is automatically considered a brother or sister in Christ. And the false application of peace is applied across the board without taking truth and holiness into consideration.

And this is why we have the ecumenical movement which embraces all religions who name the name of Christ. They would accuse others who do not embrace everyone as being divisive and not peace-makers. This has resulted in many quarters of the church recognizing an eclectic group of Evangelicals, Roman

Catholics, Mormons, Jehovah's Witnesses, Muslims and many others who are trying to be at peace with one another in the sense that they are united as brothers and sisters in the Lord.

That is not true peace or unity. To be at peace with one another does not mean we commit spiritual adultery by embracing anything or anybody who comes down the pike in the name of Christ.

Let me give you an example: The Roman Catholic Church has three main documents which they've created over the centuries which explain their doctrinal stance on issues like salvation; Vatican I and II and the Council of Trent. Quoting from the Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent they write: "If anyone says that after the reception of the grace of justification the guilt is so remitted and the debt of eternal punishment so blotted out to every repentant sinner, that no debt of temporal punishment remains to be discharged either in this world or in purgatory before the gates of heaven can be opened, let him be anathema."

In other words, if you have the audacity to suggest that Christ has forgiven you of all your sins, as you embrace Him by faith alone, without recognizing that you must still pay some of your debt for sin in this world and in purgatory, then you are accursed and damned forever. That's what anathema means.

That doesn't sound like the same gospel Jesus taught in JOH 5:24 "I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life."

The apostle Paul also has something to say on this matter.

Romans 4:5-8 ⁵ But to the one who does not work, but believes in Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is credited as righteousness, ⁶ just as David also speaks of the blessing on the man to whom God credits righteousness apart from works: ⁷ "BLESSED ARE THOSE WHOSE LAWLESS DEEDS HAVE BEEN FORGIVEN, AND WHOSE SINS HAVE BEEN COVERED. ⁸ "BLESSED IS THE MAN WHOSE SIN THE LORD WILL NOT TAKE INTO ACCOUNT."

ROM 6:22 "But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves to God, the benefit you reap leads to holiness, and the result is eternal life."

That's good news; to know that through the shed blood of Christ for the remission of our sins and by His resurrection we may have life eternal by repenting and believing on Him alone for salvation. But that is not the Gospel according to Rome.

To quote Vatican II: "From the most ancient times in the Church good works were also offered to God for the salvation of sinners.... [by] the prayers and good works of holy people.... the penitent was washed, cleansed and redeemed...."

Now before you get the impression I'm picking on Roman Catholics let me just add that I love Roman Catholics having, myself, been one for many years. But I would not embrace them as brothers or sisters in Christ with the Gospel they preach. The wrong message kills.

But here's the problem. Many Evangelicals are embracing Rome and calling them brothers and sisters in Christ. Let me quote some people who you and I would consider to be truly evangelical and yet have betrayed the fact that Roman Catholicism teaches a false gospel.

I'm taking these quotes out of Dave Hunt's book, "A Woman Rides the Beast". "I've found that my beliefs are essentially the same as those of the orthodox Roman Catholics." (Billy Graham)

"I don't know anyone more dedicated to the great fundamental doctrines of Christianity than the Catholics." (W.A. Criswell, former president, Southern Baptist Convention)

"We have differences, but on the ancient creeds and the core beliefs of Christianity we stand together." (Charles Colson)

The core beliefs of Christianity must start with the Gospel of Jesus Christ. If they do not line up with God's word then they are out of accord with the core beliefs of Christianity and instead of standing together with these false doctrines we must oppose them and seek after those people that they might repent and believe on the Lord Jesus Christ in whom alone is found salvation.

There is no peace and unity apart from holiness and truth. Now I could lay the same charge against any other group who aligns themselves with true Christianity, but oppose the true Gospel. The Roman Catholics are certainly not the only ones. But you can see how in these last days the deception is very subtle in some cases and blatant in others.

We must be on guard as we take the love of Christ, which is always united to the truth of Christ, and share it with a dying world. Let us never be blinded with a zeal to be at peace with all men at the exclusion of holiness in truth.

But when we talk about holiness it must be understood that it is not a separate entity from our salvation found in Christ. This is why our writer says at the end of verse 14, "without holiness no one will see the Lord."

The point here is that if we truly have been born from above then we have the Spirit of Christ dwelling within us. And if we have the Holy Spirit then He will be prompting us and enabling us to live a holy life as He is Holy.

It's part of the package, if you will, of our salvation. What our writer is suggesting is that to say we have life in Christ and are indwelt with His Holy Spirit and yet are not holy in our walk then one of two things is wrong.

We are either rebellious children who must come into conformity to Christ's life through repentance and seeking our Lord, or we are lifeless, not being children of God at all. Many people make professions of faith in Christ, but that doesn't necessarily mean that they are born-again.

The fruit of the Spirit is one very good indication that the Holy Spirit indwells a believer. Where there is no fruit, there may very well be no life to give true fruit. Now, ultimately only God knows the heart. But we must always be encouraging each other to love and good deeds as only the Holy Spirit can produce them.

But the message is clear, "without holiness no one will see the Lord." To suggest that we can claim Christ as our Savior without submitting to Him and walking with Him is like saying we have a faith with no fruit to accompany it.

The half-brother of Jesus, James, speaks of this.

JAM 2:14-18 "What good is it, my brothers, if a man claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save him? 15 Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food. 16 If one of you says to him, "Go, I wish you well; keep warm and well fed," but does nothing about his physical needs, what good is it? 17 In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead. 18 But someone will say, "You have faith; I have deeds."

Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by what I do."

What James is speaking of here is holiness accompanying salvation. When we think of holiness we usually associate it with some pious act where the individual walks about three feet off the ground with a halo around his head.

No, remember what holy means. It has different senses and yet a common meaning. For example we can speak of the Holy Place found in the Tent of Meeting in Israel. That kind of holy means to have a consecrated purpose unto the Lord. There is a holiness which is positional in that we are declared Holy because of the righteousness of Christ. This infers that He has set us apart for fellowship with Himself.

The Greek word here in our text is *hagiasmos* and it means properly; purification, i.e. (the state of) purity. This is holiness which shows itself outwardly in our lives which is the result of our holy position before Christ. We are able to walk in holiness as one's set apart because we have the Holy Spirit enabling us to do so.

We're not saying that simply being holy saves anyone. But it would be impossible to separate holiness from our salvation. This is what our writer means. We are not saved by good works, but we are saved unto good works which is holiness working itself out in our lives as our God and Redeemer is conforming us into the image of His Son.

Again I refer us back to ROM 6:22 "But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves to God, the benefit you reap leads to holiness, and the result is eternal life."

Notice the progression. We are set free from sin which only comes through faith in Christ. In that humbling of ourselves before Christ we have a new Master. Being His child we reap certain benefits not the least of which is holiness as the result of God working in us. And we know His result will be sure; eternal life with Him.

That's what we celebrate; life which will manifest itself in a life of love and obedience and service to our Lord. That's true holiness. That's a true sign of His life in us as His Holy Spirit bears witness with our spirits that we are His children as we walk in His ways by faith.

May we be reminded by God Himself just how He sees us and what He expects of us.

1PE 2:9-12 "But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. 10 Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy. 11 Dear friends, I urge you, as aliens and strangers in the world, to abstain from sinful desires, which war against your soul. 12 Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us."

May we live to His honor and glory and demonstrate holiness that points to a Holy God who has given us life eternal and may we be grateful and thankful all our days.