



“Pursue Peace and Holiness”  
(Hebrews 12:14)

Introduction: Last week, we were looking at the exhortation addressed to us by the Holy Spirit, through the author to the Hebrews, to run the race set before us. Remember that this race is a race against evil. It is a struggle against the principalities and powers of this age. It is a warfare against the world, the flesh and the devil. And the finish line is in heaven. The race doesn't end until we arrive there. Therefore, we are to lay aside all temptations to sin, and those sins which can so easily tie us up, those which we are especially susceptible to, and we are to press forward with endurance. We are to look to the examples which the Bible gives us, in the Old and New Testament, and those which have been found since then in church history, of those whom God enabled to run a good race, for encouragement. But we are especially to fix our eyes on Christ, the One who ran the best race, the One who ran it for us, for the strength and the encouragement that we need to finish our race. He is the beginner of our faith, the One who started us in our race, and He is the One who will bring us to its completion. We are to resist sin, even as He did, to the point of shedding blood, if necessary, in our striving against sin. And when we fail, we are to allow God's gracious and loving discipline to have its perfect work in our lives to free us from our love for sin, that we might share in Christ's life and His holiness. God's discipline is not an easy thing to undergo, as we have seen. But it is necessary, so that we might die more and more to sin and bring forth more and more the peaceful fruits of righteousness.

On the basis of this, the author to the Hebrews exhorted us strengthen our hands and knees, and to make straight paths for our feet. He meant by this that we are to forsake those things which hinder us in our race, the things which make us weak -- that is, our sin --, and press forward again with endurance. On the basis of this, he now gives us four more exhortations, two of which we will look at this evening, and two of which, Lord willing, we will look at next Lord's Day evening. Tonight, he exhorts us to two things:

*We must seek after peace with all men, and we must seek after holiness of life in all things.*

**I. The first thing he exhorts us to is pursue peace with all men.**

A. Now peace is something which is very precious to the Lord.

1. God is called the God of peace.
  - a. It is so precious to Him that He is called the “God of peace” no less than five times in the New Testament.
  - b. He is called this, because peace is what He seeks after. Peace is that which He delights in.
  - c. And certainly, it is because God delights in peace, that He sent His Son into the world, the One whom Isaiah prophesied would be called the “Prince of peace” (Isa. 9:6). He is the One who creates peace between God and man, by reconciling man to God through His life and His atoning death. He is also the One who brings peace on earth, among those with whom God is pleased (Luke 2:14), among His brethren, for, as we saw this morning, He reconciles us all to God in one body, the body of Christ.
2. Now why does God love peace so much?
  - a. Well, certainly it is God's nature. God loves everything that is right and good, and He hates everything which is contrary to His nature.
  - b. And what is the opposite of peace? It is war. God is nowhere in Scripture called the God of war. Why not? Because He hates war.
  - c. Now we know that just because God hates war, this doesn't mean that He hasn't ordained war, or commanded war, or even fought in wars Himself. We know that the Lord has ordained these things, and other things which are not good in themselves. But He does so in order to bring good out of it. And in every war that has been fought, God has been glorified in it in some way. But this doesn't mean that He ordains war for what it is in itself. Rather, He is seeking the good that He brings from them.
  - d. What God really delights in is peace. He loves harmony. Within the Godhead, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit all enjoy perfect unity, peace and fellowship. And God has reconciled us with Himself through Christ so that we too might enjoy unity and peace with Him, and with one another. Jesus prays in His high priestly prayer, “I do not ask in behalf of these alone, but for those also who believe in Me through their word; that they may all be one; even as Thou, Father, *art* in Me, and I in Thee,

that they also may be in Us; that the world may believe that Thou didst send Me. And the glory which Thou hast given Me I have given to them; that they may be one, just as We are one; I in them, and Thou in Me, that they may be perfected in unity, that the world may know that Thou didst send Me, and didst love them, even as Thou didst love Me” (John 17:20-23).

- B. Now, because Jesus has done what is necessary to make peace, He also tells us that we must do what is necessary to make peace between ourselves and others. He commands us this evening, “Pursue peace with all men.”
1. The idea here is not one of passively hoping that peace will come about on its own. It is something, he tells us, that we must actively strive after it, if we are to attain it.
    - a. Let’s face it, there are many things, even in the Christian church, that we may disagree on: points of doctrine, who may do this or that, what should be done, etc. There are also many things we may differ on with regard to education, marriage, the raising of our children, the right company to keep, and many other things. And every one of these differences has the potential to create a schism, or division, within the body.
    - b. If we do not strive to maintain peace, if we do not work hard at it, as we are called to do here, schism will develop and continue to exist. We will be divided. Which means, we will be at war with one another, a state which is so contrary to what Jesus prayed for His children.
    - c. Therefore we must work hard together to make sure that peace exists among us. We must pursue it, if we are to be a people that glorifies the Lord.
    - d. If we don’t, we not only dishonor Christ by failing to keep what He clearly commands, but we further dishonor Him by removing the testimony He desires to give the world. “By this all men will know that you are My disciples,” He says, “if you have love for one another” (John 13:35). Do you believe that you can be at war with your brothers and sisters, and still love them? And if you are at war with one another, will the world see Christ in your midst? If you think so, you are deceiving yourselves. When we’re divided, we don’t even like to be around each other.
    - e. Paul wrote to the church at Corinth, “ Now I exhort you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all agree, and there be no divisions among you, but you be made complete in the same mind and in the same judgment” (1 Cor. 1:10). Now, how are we to fulfill this? Will this happen automatically? No, it requires work. We all need to work together to achieve it.
    - f. And if we do, what a blessing it will bring. David, being filled with the Spirit, wrote, “ Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brothers to dwell together in unity! It is like the precious oil upon the head, coming down upon the beard, *even* Aaron's beard, coming down upon the edge of his robes. It is like the dew of Hermon, coming down upon the mountains of Zion; for there the LORD commanded the blessing-- life forever” (Psalm 133).
  2. And so what can we do to make peace with one another?
    - a. First, we need to work at being reconciled towards one another for whatever real offenses we may have given each other. If we have injured our brother or sister by something we have done or said, we need to go to them and seek their forgiveness.
    - b. Secondly, if we disagree with one another on certain issues, we need to work together until the difference can be cleared up. The one thing you should never do is to take your differences to other people in order to gain their sympathy. This only enlarges the schism. Wise king Solomon, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, wrote, “There are six things which the LORD hates, yes, seven which are an abomination to Him: haughty eyes, a lying tongue, and hands that shed innocent blood, a heart that devises wicked plans, feet that run rapidly to evil, a false witness *who* utters lies, and one who spreads strife among brothers” (Prov. 6:16-19). If you do all you can to bring about agreement on an issue, and you still don’t agree, then you still need to love each other anyway, and accept one another’s differences, until the Lord brings a greater light to one, or the other, or both. We must respect each other and allow each other to live according to our own consciences. We must not cast each other away because we don’t agree. Some of my closest brothers have significant differences with me on various issues. But we agree in more areas than we disagree, and this forms the basis of our unity. But even more than that, our being part of the one body of Christ, demands that we live together in unity.
    - c. Sometimes, we will run into situations where we have done everything necessary to bring peace, and still there won’t be any. Maybe someone has become offended at you for some reason, and you have

gone to them, and sought to be reconciled with them. But perhaps they wouldn't forgive you, or even listen to you. What should you do then? Well, when you have done all you should, and the other person is still not willing to do their part, then there is nothing more you can do. Sometimes the Lord will not grant to someone repentance from their sins. God will deal with them. But as far as it depends upon you, you make sure that you are doing what you should to maintain peace (Rom. 12:18).

- d. Of course, let's also not forget that prevention is the best cure for disunity. Maybe our hearts are too hard in the first place: we're not willing to overlook one another's faults, we're not willing to bear with one another's weaknesses. If we were all to seek the Lord to fill our hearts with His love, I think we would find less division and more unity among God's people.
- e. Let's also not forget that the author to the Hebrews here is saying that we must seek peace with *all* men, and not just our brethren. We are not free to be at war with them either. We are also to treat them with respect and try to live with them in peace. If there is to be any unforgiveness or hatred, it must be on their part and not yours. "Pursue peace with all men."

## II. The second thing we are exhorted to here this evening is to pursue sanctification, or holiness.

A. God is not only a God of peace, He is also a God of holiness.

1. Again, the prophet Isaiah writes, "For thus says the high and exalted One who lives forever, whose name is Holy, "I dwell *on* a high and holy place, and *also* with the contrite and lowly of spirit in order to revive the spirit of the lowly and to revive the heart of the contrite" (57:15).
2. What does it mean to be holy?
  - a. Its root idea is that of separation. When something is holy, it is separated from one thing, to something else.
  - b. In the case of God, it means that He is separated from everything which is unclean, from all sin. There is no variation or shifting shadow in Him, for He is absolutely pure. For this reason, He cannot love anyone with even a trace of sin, for it would defile both Him and heaven.
  - c. And so, in order to redeem His elect and to bring them into His presence, God sent His Son into the world to make His people holy. The way Christ did this was by dying to remove the guilt of our sin, and by giving us His Spirit to break the power of sin. Remember how Augustus Toplady puts it in his famous hymn "Rock of Ages." He writes, "Let the water and the blood, from Thy riven side which flowed, be of sin the double cure: cleanse me from its guilt and power." In order for God to bring us to heaven, it is not enough that the guilt of our sins be removed, we must also be freed from its power. This is what the Lord does in Christ.

B. And now because God is holy, and because He sent His Son into the world to make us holy, He now commands us to pursue holiness.

1. What He means by this, of course, is that He wants us to strive to be like Christ.
  - a. God predestined us to become conformed to the image of His Son (Rom. 8:29). This means that it is in His plan that we become like Him in all things, not only in the future in heaven, but right now on the earth.
  - b. But as with peace, this isn't something that will happen automatically. It is something that we must strive after, that we must pursue. We must seek to be like Christ.
  - c. But what was Christ like? He was One, whom the author to the Hebrews told us, resisted to the point of shedding blood in His striving against sin (12:4). He did not allow sin in His life. He was also One who sought in all things to give glory and honor to the Father. He did only those things which pleased Him. And He did not live for Himself, but for others, taking the form of a servant, rather than exalting Himself as a king, even dying for them, that they might be reconciled to God.
  - d. This is also what the Lord calls us to be. He calls us to be men and women, boys and girls, who will fight against sin, who will put it to death in our members, who will pursue righteousness, and who will humble ourselves to serve others.
  - e. This is what the Spirit is working to fulfill in us. He gives us the desire to live this way. But again, it doesn't happen automatically. We must also work. He doesn't do it all on His own. We must cooperate with Him to walk in all the ways of God's commands.
2. But there is one more matter which should be of great concern to us here. In the last part of the verse, there is a warning, a very serious warning. He says that we must pursue this sanctification, for without it,

“no one will see the Lord.”

- a. He is telling us here that holiness is not optional. We must strive after it, we must pursue it, or we will not see the Lord.
- b. Now does he mean that we won't see the Lord at all? Does he mean that somehow we will be in heaven, but never admitted to His presence? No. You can't be in heaven without being in His presence. Does this mean that you won't see God in any way? No. All men will see the Lord on the day of His Judgment, either as a gracious Father who will admit them to the blessings of paradise, or as a fearful Judge, who will condemn them to hell.
- c. What then does he mean? I believe that he can only be referring to the beatific vision of God, that view of God that all of the saints throughout the ages have longed for: the blessed vision of the blessed God as your God, as your Savior, as your Father. In short, what the author is saying is, If you don't pursue holiness in this life, you will not see God as your Father and Savior in the future, but rather as your Judge.
- d. Now the author does not mean by this that you must work yourself up to a certain level of holiness before you can be saved. Not at all. What he means is that if you are a true Christian, if you are truly born again, you will pursue these things, you will become increasingly holy, and you will see the Lord. If you are not a true Christian, you won't do these things.
- e. Remember what Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount about the character of every true child of the kingdom. He said, “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted. Blessed are the gentle, for they shall inherit the earth. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied. Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God” (Matt. 5:3-9). Jesus did not say that you are blessed *if you do* these things. You are blessed if these things describe what *you are already like*. If these things are in you and increasing, then the Spirit of God truly is working in you, and you will receive these promised blessings. Remember what Paul says, “For it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure” (Phil. 2:13).
- f. And so, if you see your lack of righteousness, if you are grieved by your sins, if this humbles your pride and makes you hunger and thirst after righteousness, if you are one who, realizing your need of God's mercy, show mercy to others, if your heart is pure and becoming increasingly pure from sin, and if you are seeking to bring peace among the brethren and all men, then you are truly blessed, because you are a member of God's kingdom.
- g. And since the Lord has already put these things in your heart by His Spirit, He now commands you to pursue them even more. You could not pursue them at all, if the Lord had not already had mercy on you. But you must pursue them, because you still have enemies to contend with who will seek to drag you back and tie you up in sin, so that you can't make progress in the race.
- h. And so the Lord tells us all this evening that we must pursue peace with all men. We must pursue sanctification. Without them, we will not see God, except as Judge.
- i. In closing, I would like to admonish you, that if these things are not true of you already in some measure, if they are not already the desires of your heart, if you do not desire peace, if you are not striving to be holy, then you need to come to Christ for His salvation. You need to become a new creature in Christ, or you will not be able to do these things. Believe on the Lord, trust in Him, receive Him now as your Lord and Savior, and you will find that He will give you the strength to do them.
- j. But if you already desire these things and are pursuing them, then thank the Lord, for the good work which He has begun in you, He will bring to completion on the day of Jesus Christ. All you need to do is to continue to trust Him for the power and strength to do what He here commands. Now, I'm not saying that this is easy. It isn't. You need to die to yourself and pick up your cross daily. You need to follow after Him daily. It's not easy, but it is possible, and with the Lord's help, with the gracious provision He gives you of His Spirit, you can do it.
- k. Let us strive after peace and holiness then in the Lord's power and in the strength of His might. Let us also put on His full armor, so that the enemy will not gain any more footholds, and let us run the race faithfully, pursuing peace among ourselves and all men, and growing daily more and more into the image of Christ. God will give us the strength to do so, as He promised. Let us pray that He will do so abundantly. Amen.