

## Heb 12:14-17 Duties and Pitfalls of the Gospel Life (part 1)

In our text today, we continue the author's theme of "running the race," of the Gospel. These Hebrews had come to Christ as the fulfillment of all God's promises. By faith they trusted in the one-time sacrifice of the Son of God. And because of their faith, their departure from Judaism and the Law of Moses, they were now being persecuted. And they had come to know the truth that **"those who live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted"** (2 Tim. 3:12). And some of them were apparently turning back to the old sacrificial system. This was apostasy (example of Esau). According to 6:6, they were **"crucifying once again the Son of God to their own harm and holding him up to contempt."** And in 10:26 he warns **"For if we go on sinning deliberately after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a fearful expectation of judgment . . ."** They had heard and received the GOOD NEWS of the Gospel of Christ. And as a good pastor, our author warns and exhorts and gives practical instructions as to how to live out this Gospel. And following on the heels of the discipline of God in their lives (last week), he moves to some practical duties to follow and some sins to avoid; which are very helpful to us as well as we also live out the Gospel life. Today is part 1 as we focus on two positive duties of the Christian. 1) The Gospel life requires we strive for peace with all men; 2) The Gospel life requires we strive for holiness. (Next week, we will look at the example of Esau and 4 sins to avoid.)

1. The Gospel Life Requires that We Strive for Peace with All Men. Look at v. 14: **"strive for peace with everyone."** The word translated as "strive for" means to earnestly go after. In 1 Pet. 3:10-11 we see the same word translated as "pursue." **"Whoever desires to love life and see good days, let him keep his tongue from evil and his lips from speaking deceit; let him turn away from evil and do good; let him seek peace and pursue it."** The picture is like a sailing ship pursuing with all their efforts to catch and overcome its opponent. The root of the word means to persecute. As the Hebrew Christians were pursued with diligent persecution from their Jewish brethren, (as Paul persecuted Christians) they were to have the same diligence and effort to make peace with those same Jews, as well as everyone else.

This is what we do as Christians. We are peacemakers. Jesus says: **"Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called Sons of God"** (Matt. 5:9). Paul says **"If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all"** (Rom. 12:18). Concerning the Gospel we confess, he also says that as we live this life in the gospel we are to put on the shoes of the gospel of peace as we live in this world (Eph. 6:15). Brothers and sisters, peace begins in the heart ONLY through the gospel of Christ! Every person has a heart of war until Christ, who is called the prince of peace takes up residence there. Jesus says **"Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest"** (Matt. 11:28). He says to us: **"Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid"** (John 14:27).

The reason we have peace as Christians is because of the person and work of Christ. He lived a sinless life. He laid down his life as a sacrifice for sinners, sinners who could find no peace because of the enmity that stood between them and a holy God. At the cross, we find peace as the one who took our punishment upon himself. In Eph. 2:13-16 we read: **"But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For he**

**himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility by abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace, and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility.**”

This is peace only God’s children can have and know. And our command is not only to carry this peace through the gospel of Christ to the world, but also to live at peace with all men. ALL MEN! The worst of men are included in this command. No one is exempt from this rule . . . not our enemies, not those who persecute us. EVERY PERSON. We are people of peace! This begins in our homes with our families and extends out from there. You might say, “*Jon, how can I do this? If you only knew the sin in my spouse or my child or my boss.*” I get it! On the flip side of this, and because of the gospel we profess, we often find a sword instead of an olive branch. Jesus himself warned us of this truth. He said, “**Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I have not come to bring peace, but a sword**” (Matt. 10:34). But, we are not left alone. We have the Holy Spirit. We have the Sword of the Spirit. We have the motivation of the great promises of God still to come. We have the motivation that when we seek peace with all men, they may see our good works and glorify our Father in heaven (Matt. 5:16). Brothers and sisters, our instructions are to “pursue” “strive” for peace with all men. This is our duty in the gospel life.

2. **The Gospel Life Requires that We Strive for Holiness.** Look also at v. 14: “**and for holiness without which no one will see the Lord.**” Here, we see not our duty toward our fellow man, but our duty to God, which is HOLINESS. As we diligently pursue peace with all men, we do the same with holiness. This is our duty in the Gospel. The principle is simple. God is holy. Therefore, Be holy. Pursue holiness. This is the ONLY way we can SEE GOD! This may trigger a question as you hear this. You may see your moral failures, your inconsistencies as you try to do good. As you look at your life as a father, mother, child, grandparent, boss, friend, etc., and consider all your faults, you may say with the Apostle Paul, “**I am the chief of sinners**” (1 Tim. 1:15). And since this is true, you may say, “*How can I be holy enough?*” Well, if you’ve been coming here for a period of time, I hope you have heard the words of Rom. 8:1: “**There is therefore, now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.**” Or maybe the words of Paul in Phil. 3:8-9: “**For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith.**”

You see, in Christ, God imputes his righteousness to us. He puts it into our bank account. It is ours. When God sees his children, He doesn’t see their sin. He sees the righteousness of Christ. This is the great doctrine of justification by faith. This is about righteousness. This is about holiness. But, in this passage, the author is speaking more about the active pursuit of practical holiness, the doctrine of sanctification, the diligent seeking of righteousness, of godly living now. As you’ve heard me say before, there are many who profess Christ, but do not pursue godliness in this life. They are like a beautiful cup on the outside, but on the inside there is dirt and filth. As Jesus says to the religious leaders, “**Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs, which outwardly appear beautiful, but within are full of dead people’s bones and all uncleanness**” (Matt. 23:27). They are, as Paul

says, have **“the appearance of godliness, but denying its power”** (2 Tim. 3:5). They are those who have **“received the grace of God in vain”** (2 Cor. 6:1). They are those who do not **“work out their salvation with fear and trembling”** (Phil. 2:12). They are those who are not more **“diligent to confirm their calling and election . . . sure”** (2 Pet. 1:10). They are those who walk aisles in front of people and make professions, but live their lives in practical ungodliness. They are husbands who say they love Christ and the Church, but make little effort to love their wives as Christ loved the church. They are those who say they love the people of God, but give a poor effort to be with the people they say they love, and instead spend more time with even closer friends who are not even Christians. They are those who speak highly of the things of God, but there is no practical godliness. This applies to all, even pastors who are diligent to preach the word, but make little effort to practice what they preach! Oh, how these words must convict us! How they must warn us! And for those of us who have the Spirit of Christ, these warning signs are the most welcome. At the end of the day, only those who have an inward and an outward righteousness will see the Lord! I pray and hope it will be all who hear my voice this morning.

The words “pursue” in v. 14 and “see to it” in v. 15 are plural which means we can only do this together. We are certainly responsible as individuals who name the name of Christ. But, we are responsible together as we help one another along as we pursue peace and godliness. With this in mind, I would like to read our covenant in closing.