

FOLLOW PEACE AND HOLINESS

TEXT: HEBREWS 12:12-17

Introduction:

1. The word "Wherefore" in Hebrews 12:12 signifies that the writer (probably Paul) is now going to make his application, following his instructions on divine chastisement.
2. Here in Hebrews 12:12 we read, "Wherefore lift up the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees."
3. This is a quote from Isaiah 35:3. Being chastened by the Lord often leads believers to a state of weariness and depression.
4. That is not God's purpose or intent (cf. Heb. 12:11b).
5. H.A. Ironside said, "We are so likely to refer all our perplexities and difficulties merely to natural causes, and so fail to learn the lessons they were designed to teach us by our ever patient God and Father" (*Hebrews*).

I. MAKE STRAIGHT PATHS

1. Our Lord said in Matthew 7:14, "Strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it."
2. Like hundreds of other phrases, the figure of speech. "the straight and narrow," comes from the Bible.
3. This world is on a crooked path. According to Scripture, all men are crooked sinners, but as Christians we are to "make straight paths" for our feet (Heb. 12:13).
4. A number of years ago, when the sodomites started coming out of their closets (I wish they would go back into their closets and leave us alone), a pastor friend of mine was invited to debate a homosexual activist. The homosexual kept referring to heterosexuals as "straights," so my friend said to him, "If we are straight, then that must mean you are a crook!"
5. Hebrews 12:1, 2 describes the Christian life as a race to be run. Therefore, we are to run straight for the finish line.
6. Paul said in Philippians 3:13, "Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before."
7. Natural paths are usually winding and they go around big trees, boulders, and other obstacles. But to go down a straight path means to clear the way and remove the obstacles and other hindrances.

*Nothing between my soul and the Savior,
So that His blessed face may be seen;*

*Nothing preventing the least of His favor,
Keep the way clear! Let nothing between.* -- Charles Albert Tindley

8. This takes great effort. Endurance and discipline are required.
9. Matthew Henry said, "A burden of affliction is apt to make the Christian's hands hang down, and his knees grow feeble, to dispirit him and discourage him; but this he must strive against, and that for two reasons:—*First*, That he may the better run his spiritual race and course. Faith, and patience, and holy courage and resolution, will make him walk more steadily, keep a straighter path, prevent wavering and wandering. *Secondly*, That he may encourage and not dispirit others that are in the same way with him. There are many that are in the way to heaven who yet walk but weakly and lamely in it. Such are apt to discourage one another, and hinder one another; but it is their duty to take courage, and act by faith, and so help one another forward in the way to heaven."

II. FOLLOW PEACE AND HOLINESS

1. Our Lord said, "Blessed are the peacemakers" (Matt. 5:9). Hebrews 12:14 says, "Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord."
2. We can expect the world to have no interest in holiness, but sadly, worldly preachers and worldly churches despise holiness.
3. But Hebrews 12:14 says, "Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord."
4. And I Peter 1:15 and 16 says, "But as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation; Because it is written, Be ye holy; for I am holy."
5. There is a movement today called "the emerging church." One of its leaders, a pastor from Seattle, Washington named Mark Driscoll, has described himself as, "theologically conservative and culturally liberal." Mr. Driscoll uses vulgar language from the pulpit.
6. His Mars Hills Church in Seattle has rock & roll champagne parties, watches R-rated movies, learns how to brew beer, and hosts secular rock and roll concerts.
7. Driscoll calls this "culturally liberal," but a better way to describe it would be worldly, sinful, ungodly, and wicked.
8. "Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord" (Hebrews 12:14).
9. After explaining that holiness (sanctification) means being "set apart," FB Meyer said, "Why were people, places, and things set apart? Was it not

because God was there? He came down in might and glory on Sinai; *therefore* they needed to set bounds around its lower declivities. He chose to rest on the seventh day from all his work; *therefore* it was hallowed and sanctified. He selected the Jews to be his peculiar people, and the Levites to be his priests; *therefore* they were isolated from all beside. He appeared to Moses in the bush, glowing with the light of the Shekinah; *therefore* the spot was holy ground, and the shepherd needed to bare his feet. In other words, it is the presence of God which makes holy. There is only one Being in all the universe who is really holy. Holiness is the attribute of his nature, and of his nature only. We can never be holy apart from God; but when God enters the spirit of man, he brings holiness with him. Nay, the presence of God in man is holiness" (*The Way into the Holiest*).

10. That is an excellent definition of holiness -- "the presence of God in man is holiness."
11. Here is another one. Meyer said holiness "is the indwelling of God's light and glory within us. He is the holy man in whom God dwells. He is the holier in whom God dwells more fully. He is the holiest who, however poor his intellect and mean his earthly lot, is most possessed and filled by the presence of God through the Holy Ghost. We need not wonder at the Apostle addressing believers as saints, when he was able to say of them: 'Your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost, which is in you' (I Cor. 3:16; 6:19)."
12. To "follow" after holiness means to deny self and submit to God in all things. FB Meyer said the habit of following peace and holiness is "not to be acquired in a bound or at a leap," and can be formed in its perfection only after years of self-discipline and watchfulness.

III. SIN LEADS TO BITTERNESS

1. There is a danger in not diligently pursuing peace and holiness (12:14, 15). This "failure" (12:15) is usually referred to as "backsliding."
2. Backsliding and bitterness can be avoided by the grace of God. But there is a danger in failing to appropriate the grace of God. God's grace is freely given, but oftentimes we fail to appropriate it (12:15).
3. The Lord told the apostle Paul in II Corinthians 12:9, "And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness."
4. There are many warnings in the book of Hebrews, and they are often difficult to interpret. This warning is addressed to believers, but it is doubtful Esau was ever saved (12:16).

5. The idea is that Esau had the same privileges as Jacob but Esau made the wrong choices.
6. A similar warning is found in Deuteronomy 29:18.
7. Churches that tolerate fornication (12:16) are soon corrupted and defiled.
8. Good churches do not tolerate immorality, but oftentimes when the fornicator is disciplined, his family and friends become bitter.
9. By the way, that message Sunday evening by our guest preacher was excellent. Many Christians are not right with God because they have never really repented, and they have not made proper restitution.
10. Esau is mentioned as a type of a profane person, "who for one morsel of meat sold his birthright" (12:16).
11. William Newell defined "profane person" as "one in whom there is no thought of God" (*Hebrews*).
12. For one momentary gratification of the flesh, there are many like Esau who forfeit the blessings of God. His foolish decision was irrevocable (12:17). He could not undo what was done.
13. Genesis 25:34 says Esau "Esau despised his birthright."
14. "Profane" (Heb. 12:16) persons despise the privileges of God, and the blessings of God.
15. Andrew Murray said, "Abraham and Isaac and Jacob sacrificed all to become heirs of the heavenly city of the future, and the heavenly blessing. Esau lived in the present : for a momentary satisfaction he parted with his blessing, the promise of God, and his inheritance in the future. And even so there are numbers who are called Christians, and yet are profane. There is nothing sacred or holy in their spirit or life. They are absorbed in the present of the possessions and pleasures of the world. To speak of their pursuit of holiness would be a mockery. Let us think of such, and mourn and pray and labour for them. Looking carefully lest there be any one of you a profane person, like Esau" (*The Holiest of All*).

CONCLUSION:

1. The words "backsliding" and "backslidings" occur 16 times in the Old Testament, but not once in the New Testament.
2. The word "slide" is found three times in the Old Testament. David said, "Judge me, O LORD; for I have walked in mine integrity: I have trusted also in the LORD; therefore I shall not slide" (Psalm 26:1).
3. But though these words are not found in the New Testament, the doctrine of backsliding is, especially here in the epistle to the Hebrews.
4. Preaching a message from our text, back in 1870, Spurgeon said, "If there is in this house, today, any who have backslidden, I beg them to mourn,

indeed, and put their trust in Jesus, and begin again. And if there is any professor, young or old, who ought not to be a professor, I ask him either to lay down his profession or make it real. Do not add to your sins this sin of pretending to be a Christian if you are not. Be honest. O do not wound Christ with unnecessary wounds. If you make no profession you will at least be free from the sin of hypocrisy. But I pray you do not sell your birthright for a little pottage. Do not let your God and Savior go for a little of this world's vanities" ("The Winnowing Fan").