

Hebrews 12:14-17

Introduction

The main issue for the author of Hebrews was that the believers, to whom he wrote, would stand firm when the day of testing came.

The author fully expected suffering and persecution, if it had not already started, to begin in soon, and likely intensify.

Hebrews 12 begins with the picture of the long distance, endurance race that Christians are to run, shedding every hindrance and fleeing sin so as to persevere to the end with our eyes fixed on Christ (**Heb 12: 1–3**).

Vv. 4–13 then speak of God’s discipline as He trains His children through discipline and correction for a harvest of righteousness.

Summary

In Hebrews 12:14-17, the author continues his discourse, giving straightforward instruction that all believers need in order to know how to live as a Christian.

1. Two Specific Aims vs. 14

The author gives his readers some specific guidance regarding the Christian life.

First, Christians are commanded to live peacefully with the people around them; to be peacemakers in the world (**Matt. 5:9; Rom. 12:18; Heb 12:14a**).

This is to be a sustained and determined pursuit.

This peace is to be considered in broad terms (**Psalms 34:14**); peace with our neighbors and being a blessing to others ahead of our own rights, prerogatives, priorities and preferences (**1 Peter 2:21**).

Secondly, the Christian life is not only focused on our relations with other people, it also has a vertical dimension: our relationship with God (**Heb 12:14b**).

Holiness means “set apart”: set apart from the sinful world and set apart to God.

This is not an option for the believer (**2 Tim. 2:19**).

Our salvation, as believers, is not caused by our holiness, but those who are saved are necessarily to be holy, for this is God’s very purpose in saving us, that we might “be conformed to the image of his Son” (**Rom. 8:29; c.f. James 2:17**).

Although we are to be a blessing to the world, a source of peace to those around us so far as we are able, it is never by compromising with the world, or by becoming worldly.

Our striving after peace and holiness go together.

This is a great struggle for sinners like us, which is why the text exhorts us to “strive” (vs. 14a; c.f. Phil. 3:12–14).

A Christian pursues holiness by longing more to reflect God’s holy character and to see the death of sin in our hearts by the power of his grace.

This means learning to think differently; not to think in terms of popularity or image or to put ourselves first. Instead, believers are called to live in such a way that expresses love for God in our obedience to Him and love for people, to think about how God would have us act in various situations, and to be willing to go out of our way for the sake of someone else.

All believers are called to “strive for peace with everyone, and for holiness.”

2. First Threat vs. 15a

The author of Hebrews goes on to list three threats to Christians, both individually and corporately.

First: “See to it that no one fails to obtain the grace of God” (Heb 12:15a).

This is the author’s overarching concern, that someone might fall behind or drop out of the race.

The author has expressed this concern about apostasy a number of times in Hebrews, that there would be people among his readers who under trial would deny Christ and fall away (Heb 2:1; 3:12; 6:4-8; 10:36).

Now, in this fifth exhortation against apostasy, the author of Hebrews describes it as missing or falling back from the grace of God.

Whilst, the Bible teaches that all true Christians are secure in God’s saving work (1 Peter 1:5), it also teaches that the reality of the believer’s faith is proved by our perseverance to the end (James 2:17).

The author also outlines an antidote for this first danger: the pastoral care of Christians (Heb 12:15a).

Christians are actively to beware of this danger, especially as they are facing tribulation.

The author is not necessarily restricting this duty exclusively to pastors in the church, but this is one of a minister’s principal duties: to check up on the flock, to make sure all are coming along, and especially to take note of any who have disappeared.

We are to seek out those who seem to have fallen back or turned away, to inquire about their struggle, to exhort and encourage them in the truth of the gospel, and in that way we are used by God for the perseverance of those who are his own.