

Text: Heb 12.14, 15. Focus on individual salvation can diminish concern for congregational salvation (CS)—that all church members should prove to be saved at last. Love requires such mutual concern from us all, for us all.

Imagine crossing the Atlantic with the Pilgrims centuries ago. What would you think of one who only cared for his own survival, and did nothing to preserve the lives of fellow travelers? Children playing too close to the edge of the deck? Hoarding food for himself alone? etc.

CS a special concern of pastors (Acts 20.28), legitimate general concern of all. Not all may preach, but all can set a good example, pray, warn, encourage.

Our text states what we must do, positively (v. 14) and what we must watch out for, negatively (v. 15), for the ultimate salvation of us all:

Strive together toward final salvation, realizing some of us may fall away.

We strive because of grace; striving is its fruit. So prepare for the possibility that some church members may prove to be wicked after all.

OUR SPIRITUAL AIM (v. 14). Salvation and the kind of life that leads to it.

1. Ultimate: To See the Lord. An epitome of final salvation (Matt 5.8; Rev 22.3, 4) → Christ’s immediate, favorable, eternal presence. All good is there in this “beatific vision,” “the blessed state of the glorified saints in heaven, where they behold the glory of the Lord and enjoy perfect and sinless communion with Him” (DTT, Cairns). This must be our ultimate goal, our supreme desire, the bullseye, surrounded by all else as rings.

BUT this blessedness is only coming to *some* in the visible church. The absolute condition stated here is that you pursue an intermediate aim, “apart from which (lit.) *no one* will see the Lord,” not even church members!

2. Intermediate: Peace and Holiness.

◆ The activity required: “follow” (KJV). Gk. word → “pursue, strive for, seek after, aspire to something” (BAGD); “going after something with the intent to catch it” (LBSL); “to do something with intense effort and with definite purpose or goal” (LN 68.66). “Make every effort” (ESV). Imp.: This pursuit is *necessary* to attain the objects.

◆ Peace, the first object of our pursuit (cf. Rom 14.19; 1 Pet 3.11). Peace is “a state of concord: *harmony*” (BAGD). No discord, strife, resentment. Not peace *with God* here, but “peace with everyone” (ESV), i.e.,—interpersonal relationships, esp. with brethren (1 Thess 5.13; Eph 4.3). This is so precious (Psa 133.1) and only continues by a continual commitment among us to pursue it vigorously! APPLICATION: “Am I at peace with everyone here? Am I aware of anyone I’ve offended? What can I do for peace? Can I forgive/seek forgiveness? Have a difficult heart-to-heart? Go out of my way to show kindness?”

◆ Holiness, the second object of our pursuit. The verb attaches to this, too. Not “peace at any price,” but peace consistent with righteousness (cf. Jas 3.17). “Personal dedication to the interests of

[God]: *consecration, sanctification*” (BAGD); “the act of becoming more personally dedicated to God; especially by becoming more distinct, devoted, or morally pure” (LBSL). Christians only make spiritual progress on purpose with great effort blessed by grace. You can’t coast into heaven! It is an arduous climb, not a lazy fall.

The peace and the holiness [here] belong together: the holy man is a man of peace. The lack of peace, individually, socially, and internationally, in our world is the inevitable consequence of the unholiness which flourishes when the relationship with God who is the Holy One is severed through the rebellion of sin. . . . The Christian community, then, should be a living example of harmony and holiness. Where disharmony and disaffection appear it is a sure sign of the presence of unholiness within the [brotherhood] (P. E. Hughes, in loc.).

BUT we need more counsel, because a secret danger may lurk among us, and we must be on guard against it, “looking diligently” (v. 15a). Only other instance of this term is 1 Pet 5.2, “exercising oversight,” verbal form of “overseer,” meaning “to give careful consideration to something, with the implication of guarding against” (LN 30.46). Diligent PURSUIT and diligent CAUTION are both required for a congregation’s spiritual safety.

OUR SPIRITUAL DANGER (v. 15). Rise of spiritually poisonous church members.

1. Ultimate: To “fail [fall short] of the grace of God” → shorthand for all the blessings of saving grace: justification, sanctification, glorification. To “fail” or “fall short of” them is never to be saved at all—not to have truly had and then really lost them—though some *seem to lose* them.

“Lest” means “for fear that” (MWCD), “with the intention of preventing [something undesirable]” (NOAD). Vigilance is a means of prevention. “Forewarned, forearmed; to be prepared is half the victory” (Cervantes).

2. Immediate: The Unconverted Church Member. Very specific example of an individual falling short of the grace of God, like Esau the fornicator (v. 16), Judas the betrayer, etc.—cancers in the body. Watch for the first signs.

A. Identified as a “root of bitterness.” Wrongly conceived as a sin of bitterness (“anger and disappointment at being treated unfairly,” NOAD) (e.g., *The Woman’s Study Bible*). BUT see Deut 29.18, 19 (q.v.), “a root bearing poisonous and bitter fruit” (ESV), a person who thinks, “I shall be safe, though I walk in the stubbornness of my heart” (ESV). For such a “root” to “spring up” among us is for someone to stand out *for sinning*, grossly failing to pursue peace/holiness (divisive, carnal).

B. Described as very harmful—trouble and defilement. Like poison ivy.

First, the church as a whole is “troubled,” as John Owen says, 1) grief over their self-destruction, 2) disorder, confusion among us, 3) harming the ministry’s reputation (*Hebrews commentary*, in loc.).

Second, “many [may] be defiled” by such an apostate. “It seldom stops with themselves. The ignorance, negligence, darkness, but especially the want of experience of the power of the truth of the gospel, are easily imposed on by them, and thereby they are defiled” (ibid.). Many are easily led astray, like lemmings over a cliff. Ω