

Hebrews Chapter 12D

IN 1976 (before many of you were born) Frances Schaeffer, one of the 20th century's great Christian thinkers wrote a book entitled "How Then Shall We Live?"

- IN that book Schaeffer described what he saw as the decline of Western Society from a Biblically based system of absolutes to a society in which all values are relative and there is no way to distinguish right from wrong.
- As you can see, His writings were insightful, possibly even prophetic.

Dr Schaeffer said: "There is a flow to history and culture. This flow is rooted in what a people think, and what they think will determine how they act. There is a violence and a breakdown in society to the point where it is unsafe to walk through the streets in many of the cities of our world. On the other hand, there is a danger of increasing authoritarianism to meet the threat of chaos. In our own countries as well as internationally should we despair and give up, if not, "How then should we live?"

I believe that Dr Schaeffer's question is even more relevant today than it was in the time when he wrote it.

- In light of the ongoing secularization of American Society combined with a continued moral decline His question remains in the forefront of our minds.
- How then should we live?
- How should WE who believe the Bible to be the sole source of absolute truth live in a society that is radically pluralistic??
- How can we promote holiness in a culture that encourages and even celebrates all forms of immorality
- How can we live as peacemakers in a society that is increasingly violent?
- How can WE, who love the Lord Jesus live in a world that is more and more antagonistic toward people of Faith?

Well, not to despair: God has NOT left it up to us to answer this difficult question on our own. In His infinite wisdom he has given us His Word. With the Bible in our hands we have the trustworthy record of more than 4000 years of human history.

- Reading through the Biblical narrative we can see how the people of God lived and thrived amidst every type of society and every manner of government.
- We can read about the lives of His chosen people who lived in a blossoming theocracy in the times of Joshua, Judges and 1 Samuel.
- We read the record of Daniel who was taken captive in his early teens and dragged off to live under the rule of that narcissistic Dictator Nebuchadnezzar. Daniel flourished!
- We read about the Apostles who lived during the decline of the Roman Empire and endured the oppression of Claudius, Nero, Domitian, and the Church grew!

God's Word provides inspiration and insight into how the people of God can live and flourish regardless of the form of government or the state of the society that surrounds them.

I can't imagine a better time for us to be studying the Book of Hebrews!

- Think about it; If we live in a representative form of Government. What does the current state of that government say about the condition of American Society?
- IF we really want to know how to live our lives for the glory of God we should take the advice of the Author of Hebrews and simply Look to Jesus

2 looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God. 3 Consider him who endured from sinners such hostility against himself, so that you may not grow weary or fainthearted.

- We are to turn our eyes away from everything else and look to Jesus

Hebrews, 1: 3 He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power. After making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high,

Hebrews 5: 8 Jesus became the source of eternal salvation to all who obey him,

Hebrews 7:22 Jesus is the guarantor of a better covenant.

Hebrews 9:12, by his own blood he secured eternal redemption

Hebrews 9:15, He is the mediator of a New Covenant.

NOW Having come to the final section of the book, after clearly portraying the work of Christ and His ongoing priestly intercession we come to a series of brief exhortations that are designed to help US live our lives for the glory of God in a fallen world.

Last week we focused our attention on the hurdles, hardships and trials that we face as we run the race of faith. The author helped us to understand that the difficulties we encounter along this path of life have been ordained by God as agents of change, lovingly designed by God himself to transform us into the image of Christ.

- Now that we see our hardships in a different light, let's get back to running the race of faith.

As we pick up the text we return to the metaphor of a marathon race that we saw in verses 1-2.

1. Pick up (Hands that droop)
2. Pursue (peace and Holiness)
3. Perceive (see the dangers

1 Pick Up

Hebrews 12: 12 **Therefore lift your drooping hands and strengthen your weak knees,**
13 **and make straight paths for your feet, so that what is lame may not be put out of joint**
but rather be healed.

The first thing that happens when a runner becomes tired is that his arms start to drop to his side. And that significantly affects his ability to run.

- The position and motion of the arms is extremely important in running, the arms help to maintain proper body coordination and rhythm.
- The arms actually help to pull the runner through his stride and so the first sign of fatigue is the drooping of the arms.
- In the process of fatigue, the second thing to go is the knees. When the knees begin to wobble the runner is in trouble.
- AT this point if he is going to finish the race he MUST focus all of his attention on the goal and push his body beyond its limits to gain the prize.
- He must “Pick Up” those drooping hands and strengthen those weak knees.

Here in Hebrews 12 the writer is using the same metaphor that is found in Isaiah 35.

- In both cases the Hebrew people were enduring the hard discipline of the Lord in a series of very painful ordeals.
- In both cases the people of God were discouraged and despondent, their hands were drooping, their knees were weak and they were close to giving up.
- Look at the Word of the Lord in Isaiah 35 and see the similarities.

Isaiah 35: 3 **Strengthen the weak hands, and make firm the feeble knees.**

4 **Say to those who have an anxious heart, "Be strong; fear not! Behold, your God will come with vengeance, with the recompense of God. He will come and save you."**

- The original text in both Hebrews and Isaiah speak of strengthening THE weak hands and feeble knees.
- The English translation of Hebrews 12:12 says “Lift YOUR drooping hands” but the word “Your” isn’t in the original text. WHY am I mentioning that?

The emphasis in both texts are the same: we are NOT told to strengthen OUR OWN hands and knees but THE dropping hands and THE feeble knees of any and ALL members in the community of the Believing.

- In other words we are not called to obsess about our own weaknesses but to look out for and to strengthen one another when we see hands that are drooping.
- In essence this is the same Idea that is behind Hebrews 10.

Hebrews 10: 24 **And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works,**
25 **not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another,**
and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.

- Friends we are in this race of faith together and one of the best ways to persevere and keep running yourself is to assist the other runners around you.

Hebrews 12: 13 **and make straight paths for your feet, so that what is lame may not be put out of joint but rather be healed.**

- This phrasing also has community connotations.
- When a runner moves out of his lane not only is He disqualified from the race himself, but his error causes him to interfere with others who are running the same race.
- Runners don't intentionally leave their designated lanes, it is only when they are distracted or careless, only when they become fatigued or lose their concentration that they veer out of their lane.

If you have been running this marathon of faith for prolonged season you have most likely encountered other runners who have veered off course.

- Their carelessness most likely affected your pace and your faith. It momentarily took your eyes off of the goal, it interrupted your path, it may even have tripped you up.
- ALL the more reason to heed the counsel of Solomon in Proverbs 4

Proverbs 4: 25 **Let your eyes look directly forward, and your gaze be straight before you.**

26 **Ponder the path of your feet; then all your ways will be sure.**

27 **Do not swerve to the right or to the left; turn your foot away from evil.**

The writer moves on to tell us that OUR perseverance in the marathon of faith will require the pursuit of peace and holiness.

Point #2 Pursue (Peace and Holiness)

Hebrews 12:14 **Strive for peace with everyone, and for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord.**

The first of these twin pursuits has to do with our relationship with other people and the second with our relationship with God.

Christians are commanded to live peacefully with all the people around them, we are called to be peacemakers in the world.

In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus told the crowd who followed him, **“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.”**

The Apostle Paul instructed the church at Rome in a similar fashion, **“If possible, so far as it depends on you, live at peace with all.”**

According to the writer of Hebrews we are to **“Strive for peace with all men.”**

The wording that is used here in Hebrews pictures a sustained and determined pursuit; like a hunter who is intently tracking his prey we are to diligently seek peace with all men.

- I do not believe that we are called to seek peace at the cost of compromising morality and truth.
- I believe that the very foundation of our unity and our peace is established on Biblical truth.
- We should think of this peace in broad terms, as the effect of the gospel on a society as it is transmitted through our lives.

We serve as peacemakers when we hold forth the reconciliation with God that comes through the Gospel. We pursue peace when we teach our children to take their sinful attitudes to the Lord in repentance. We are peacemakers when we display the love of Christ to our neighbors.

A story was told By Pastor Richard Phillips:

A Christian man in the far east owned a rice field that was high up on a hill and he had to hand pump water every day from the irrigation stream that flowed at the base of the hill. Below him on that same hill his neighbor had a rice field but rather than hand pump water into his own field, the neighbor drilled holes the dividing wall that separated the Christian man's field from his own.

The Christian man became greatly frustrated with his neighbor's creative laziness and he consulted a Christian friend asking, "What shall I do?"

I have tried to be patient and not retaliate. Is it right for me to confront my neighbor?

The two men prayed and then the Friend said to the Christian man, "As Christians we have a responsibility before God to seek more than justice for ourselves, we must live in such a way as to be a blessing to others.

Armed with this advice the Christian man developed a strategy to pursue peace with his neighbor. The first thing he did the very next day was to pump water into his neighbor's field and then went on to pump water into his own field and this he did every day for a week.

Before long his curious neighbor came out of his house and asked why the Christian man would perform this act of benevolence every day. That conversation led to a relationship and eventually to the neighbor becoming a Christian himself.

Seeking peace with all men is an attitude of the heart that prefers the blessing of another above our own rights and prerogatives. The Apostle Peter put it this way, "Christ also suffered, leaving you an example, so that you may follow in his footsteps... When he was reviled, he did not revile in return, when he suffered he did not threaten, but he continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly." (1 Peter 2:21 & 23)

We need to remember that the horizontal relationship with our fellow man is dependent upon a healthy vertical relationship with God, so we MUST "Strive for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord."

- The Greek word that is translated “Holiness” in other places is translated “Sanctification.” The word describes the process whereby Christians are continually being freed from the power of sin and transformed into the likeness of Christ.

First, I think we should understand that when we speak of Holiness we need to address the Already / Not Yet reality of our salvation.

- Already – we possess the perfect righteousness of Christ, in which we stand holy before God. That righteousness was given to us as a gift when we were justified by faith in Christ.
- Not Yet – Even though we already possess the righteousness of Christ we do not yet live in perfect holiness as a day to day experience. Sanctification is the process whereby we are becoming that which God has declared us to be.

Holiness is not an option that you can take or leave there is no place in Biblical Christianity for moral license or lawlessness.

- God, who is holy, has decreed that all who believe will be holy.

The Apostle Paul said, **“Let everyone who names the name of the Lord depart from iniquity.”** (2 Tim 2:19b)

- While none of us possess perfection in holiness all who are born of God are growing in it.
- Paul expresses God’s purpose in saving us when he writes:

Romans 8: 29 **For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son,**

- Personal Holiness is a necessary consequence of the saving work of Christ.

It is the advance of this progressive work of the Holy Spirit that Believers are to zealously seek after, STRIVE for, Pursue with their whole heart.

- Let me ask you: HOW is the pursuit of Holiness going in your life?
 - I’m not merely addressing the outward displays of holiness but the inward purity of heart. **Blessed are the pure in heart, they shall see God.**

With that holiness in mind the author now elaborates on THREE DANGERS that believers face as they **Strive for peace and holiness.**

3 Perceive (the dangers)

As we run the race of faith we need to keep our eyes wide open.

This text ALSO addresses the Body of Christ corporately: We need to help one another avoid these 3 imminent dangers:

Hebrews 12: 15 **See to it that no one fails to obtain the grace of God; that no "root of bitterness" springs up and causes trouble, and by it many become defiled;**

16 that no one is sexually immoral or unholy like Esau, who sold his birthright for a single meal. 17 For you know that afterward, when he desired to inherit the blessing, he was rejected, for he found no chance to repent, though he sought it with tears.

First the writer provides an overarching concern that uniquely fits his readers. It is a concern that someone might fall behind or drop out of the race.

“See to it that no one fails to obtain the grace of God”

- The words, “See to it” express a call for mutual pastoral care among the whole flock of God. Those words translate of the Greek word (Episkopeo) which means to have oversight of.
- As members of the Body of Christ we are to watch over, to show diligence in care for one another. We are not to be so consumed with the cares of this world or distracted by our own personal agenda to the point where we neglect to express brotherly love.
- The author’s concern over the possibility of Apostasy has been clear from the beginning of the letter.

Ch 2 – He instructed his readers to *“pay close attention to what they heard, so that they do not drift away from it.”*

Ch 3 - 12 *Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God.*

Ch 6 – he warned against making superficial commitment to Christ. Whether that was a mere intellectual assent to the facts or living on the basis of a spiritual experience that did not result in perseverance.

According to the writer of Hebrews The Body of Christ must be like the U.S. Marines: We are to **“leave no man behind.”**

Secondly we are to **see to it that no "root of bitterness" springs up and causes trouble, and by it many become defiled;**

- Once again this exhortation involves corporate oversight. We are to be on the lookout for poisonous roots that defile large groups of people.
- Many of you, like me, have heard teachings based on this verse dealing with the dangers of personal bitterness and unforgiveness and how they can poison the Body of Christ.
- While that is certainly something to be aware of, I believe that this warning deals with a much deadlier poison than our feelings about another person.
- I believe that this verse actually reflects upon an earlier warning that God announced to the people of Israel in Deuteronomy 29.
- As Moses was affirming the covenant of God with the people of God He gives them this strong warning:

Deuteronomy 29: 16 "You know how we lived in the land of Egypt, and how we came through the midst of the nations through which you passed. 17 And you have seen their detestable things, their idols of wood and stone, of silver and gold, which were among them. 18 Beware lest there be among you a man or woman or clan or tribe whose heart is turning away today from the LORD our God to go and serve the gods of those nations. Beware lest there be among you a root bearing poisonous and bitter fruit,

- In Egypt and in all of the lands through which they passed they were surrounded by idolatrous peoples. They encountered pagan rituals involving seductive practices that were alluring to the flesh.
- Literally Tens of thousands of Israelites died when the influence of these practices infiltrated their ranks
- Whether it was the worship of Ashtoreth or Baal in the ancient times, the worship of the Caesars in the times of the Apostles or the worship of Mary and various Saints or the practices of Eastern Meditation to hear the voice of God today.
- We need to "See to it that no poisonous root infiltrates the ranks of God's people."

The Last Danger that we will consider this morning is one that has become a plague on our society.

See to it - **that no one is sexually immoral or unholy like Esau. (Vs 16)**

- This double barreled danger describes an attitude toward life that is characterized by the pursuit of carnal cravings and godless gains. The word (PORNOS – depicts all aspects of sexual immorality)
- When you combined immoral with unholy you have:
- A person who lives primarily for the things of this present world and has no regard for spiritual or eternal realities.
- And Esau the one who sold his birthright for a bowl of stew serves as the poster-child for those who are profane or unholy.
- Esau was a sensually oriented man who prioritized his fleshly passions and desires above the great and precious promises of God and lived his life as a rebel.
- The Apostle Paul told the church at Galatia:

Galatians 6: 7 **Do not be deceived: God is not mocked, for whatever one sows, that will he also reap. 8 For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life.**

HOW then should we LIVE? Having been born of God, Sealed with the Holy Spirit we should live First and foremost, for the glory of God.

- Daily declaring our dependence on HIM for grace, forgiveness and power to live a new life.
- Daily we preach the Gospel to ourselves in an effort to grow in holiness

AND Because we have all been baptized by one Spirit into One Body.

We are to live in loving COMMUNITY watching over one another, caring for one another encouraging one another, challenging one another in truth and humility.

We live with a mutual care and concern for the eternal wellbeing of our brothers and Sisters in Christ.

- We spring into action when we see drooping hands and feeble knees. Encouraging one another to run with perseverance the race that is set before us.
- Together we pursue peace with all men and preach the Gospel to ourselves in order that we may grow in holiness.
- We share in a mutual oversight so that No One of us fails to obtain the grace of God

You may be here this morning and HOLINESS is the farthest thing from your mind.

You are striving to exist, laboring with all of your strength just to survive.

Let me introduce you to my father. He takes care of the birds of the air... He clothes the flowers of the field....

- He did not create you to be self-sustaining. He made you to rest in Him, His provision, his peace.....

Matthew 11:28 **Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.**
29 **Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.**

30 **For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."**

- Repent and believe.