



The Book of Hebrews

Verses 12:14-29

Sept 9, 2018

In our last lesson we looked at the first half of Hebrews 12 and how our life here on Earth as a Christian can be compared to a runner in a marathon. This week we study the rest of chapter 12. We are given a few “rules of the road” to help us as we run our race.

Hebrews 12:14-17 – ¹⁴ *Work at living in peace with everyone, and work at living a holy life, for those who are not holy will not see the Lord.* ¹⁵ *Look after each other so that none of you fails to receive the grace of God. Watch out that no poisonous root of bitterness grows up to trouble you, corrupting many.* ¹⁶ *Make sure that no one is immoral or godless like Esau, who traded his birthright as the firstborn son for a single meal.* ¹⁷ *You know that afterward, when he wanted his father’s blessing, he was rejected. It was too late for repentance, even though he begged with bitter tears.*

Verses 14-17 give us some great general guidelines for how we should live our daily lives. There’s quite a bit here so let’s break it down into a nice little list.

1. *Work at living in peace with everyone* – In other words, don’t be a jerk and don’t sweat it when others are a jerk to you. You’ll notice that the phrase “work at” is used rather than “try.” This means we need to put in some effort to the task! And, with whom are we to live in peace?... *everyone!*

Let’s be honest. Some people are just tough to tolerate! And, the toughest thing to do is to turn the other cheek when someone is being rude to or even wrongs you in some way. Jesus summed it up succinctly in **Matthew 5:38-40** – ³⁸ *“You have heard the law that says the punishment must match the injury: ‘An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth.’* ³⁹ *But I say, do not resist an evil person! If someone slaps you on the right cheek, offer the other cheek also.* ⁴⁰ *If you are sued in court and your shirt is taken from you, give your coat, too.”*

So, when I’m wronged you’re saying I should just let them get away with whatever they want to do to us? The answer to that question is in **Romans 12:18-21** – ¹⁸ *If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all.* ¹⁹ *Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, “Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.”* ²⁰ *To the contrary, “if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink; for by so doing you will heap burning coals on his head.”* ²¹ *Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.*

By letting God avenge us, we show we are placing our faith and trust in God and that He will take care of us. It also frees us from the toxic effects that seeking revenge brings upon a person. There’s also a

flipside to this. We must not be found guilty of wronging others (lying, cheating, stealing, gossiping, etc.) for God will surely discipline us, too!

2. work at living a holy life, for those who are not holy will not see the Lord – Again, there’s that word “work”! We must put in conscious effort to live for God from the inside out. A holy life is not what is observed externally by others but is instead defined by how you live within your heart for God knows what is there. There is also a stern warning here for those who think they can “scam the system.” It won’t work! Again, God knows our hearts and all will be revealed and exposed when we stand before Him on that Judgment Day.
3. Look after each other – Help each other out; be a support group. That doesn’t mean we try to become a mommy or an overseer to our Christian brothers and sisters. It’s also not a license to be a busybody meddling in the affairs of others. Nor does it mean it becomes our job to ensure that everyone around is told they’re a sinner.

By the same token, we also shouldn’t get immediately offended when a Christian brother or sister expresses concern about our behavior or actions that alarms them. Keep the dialog open. Honestly weigh what they say to see if they have a good point. Pray on it. Who knows, God just might be using them to speak to you. If they’re right, make changes in your life. If they’re wrong, just let it roll off your back like water off a duck’s (remember the “live peacably” part from above).

On the flipside, it also means we shouldn’t be using our Christian brothers and sisters as a crutch when we should be carrying our own burdens. God often gives us burdens we cannot bear so that we learn to lean on Him and not necessarily on our fellow Christians!

4. Watch out that no poisonous root of bitterness grows up to trouble you – Stay joyful and be content. This ties in somewhat to the previous points. Don’t let the actions of others or the perceived unfairness of your own life make you bitter. If the life you have seems austere then remember that the best fruit is harvested from a well-pruned tree.
5. Make sure that no one is immoral or godless – This gets back a little to point #3. We should help each other endure and make sure no one falls away. None of us are getting out of this life alive! We need each other’s help to gird us up so that we can finish this race on our feet. It’s tough to live in this world as a Christian without getting sidetracked from our goal by the enemy. We must help and encourage each other so that we stay on the narrow path and not give up.

Hebrews 12:18-21 – ¹⁸ *You have not come to a physical mountain, to a place of flaming fire, darkness, gloom, and whirlwind, as the Israelites did at Mount Sinai.* ¹⁹ *For they heard an awesome trumpet blast and a voice so terrible that they begged God to stop speaking.* ²⁰ *They staggered back under God’s command: “If even an animal touches the mountain, it must be stoned to death.”* ²¹ *Moses himself was so frightened at the sight that he said, “I am terrified and trembling.”*

Living in the Old Testament was a terrifying time! Like infants, the early Israelites needed God’s constant watch and strict, firm hand to keep them on the right path. Their existence was a very black-and-white one. A terrifying one that was based on strict letter-of-the-law obedience with awful consequences for failure. Thank God that we no longer have to live in those times.

However, the consequences for failure today are still no less awful. If we reject His wonderful love we will wind up in an eternity of torment as we find in Jesus’ words in **Matthew 7:21-23** – ²¹ *“Not everyone who calls out to me, ‘Lord! Lord!’ will enter the Kingdom of Heaven. Only those who actually do the will of my Father in heaven*

will enter. ²² On judgment day many will say to me, 'Lord! Lord! We prophesied in your name and cast out demons in your name and performed many miracles in your name.' ²³ But I will reply, 'I never knew you. Get away from me, you who break God's laws.'

That is a really heavy statement and a very stern warning. Our service to God must be *real* because He knows the condition of our hearts. He doesn't expect perfection but he does expect devotion! Make sure your heart is right with Him!

On a much brighter note, we are next given a glimpse of what it will be like for those found faithful when we live in Heaven with Him.

Hebrews 12:22-24 – ²² No, you have come to Mount Zion, to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to countless thousands of angels in a joyful gathering. ²³ You have come to the assembly of God's firstborn children, whose names are written in heaven. You have come to God himself, who is the judge over all things. You have come to the spirits of the righteous ones in heaven who have now been made perfect. ²⁴ You have come to Jesus, the one who mediates the new covenant between God and people, and to the sprinkled blood, which speaks of forgiveness instead of crying out for vengeance like the blood of Abel.

What a different picture these words evoke over the picture the Old Testament paints. Thank God that we no longer live in darkness but have become bathed in the light of His love. We have entered the new covenant that is focused on the forgiveness of sins that Jesus's precious sacrifice provides rather than on the punishment for our sins. However, just as we were warned in Matthew 7 above, we must still be wary that we have truly accepted Christ ourselves and are not just basking in the Light from those around us who have.

Hebrews 12:25 – ²⁵ Be careful that you do not refuse to listen to the One who is speaking. For if the people of Israel did not escape when they refused to listen to Moses, the earthly messenger, we will certainly not escape if we reject the One who speaks to us from heaven!

Rejection is not necessarily just an out and out denial of Christ's sacrifice. We are warned here in no uncertain terms here that we will not escape if we reject Jesus. Yes, our God is wonderful and loving but He is also a just and righteous God who requires obedience and faithfulness. There will be no "floaters" who make it into Heaven!

Hebrews 12:26-29 – ²⁶ When God spoke from Mount Sinai his voice shook the earth, but now he makes another promise: "Once again I will shake not only the earth but the heavens also."²⁷ This means that all of creation will be shaken and removed, so that only unshakable things will remain.

²⁸ Since we are receiving a Kingdom that is unshakable, let us be thankful and please God by worshiping him with holy fear and awe.²⁹ For our God is a devouring fire.

The writer here is trying to remind us of just exactly who God is. Our God is not only loving and nurturing but He is also completely righteous and so powerful that He could (and did) *speak* all things into existence. He will suffer our disobedience for only a time and after that time we will either be rewarded for our faithfulness or pay for the lack of it! So, strive always to be found faithful!