

Guard Your Heart

Ephesians 5:22-27

Dr. Paul Cannings

A. Pursue Peace (vs. 14):

1. Pursue peace with all men - In the midst of these believers being threatened horribly (10:32-39) they are commanded to not hastily and intensely retaliate. They are commanded to direct their attention to so trust God to provide deliverance from all their distress, they do not bitterly create strife with those who persecute them.
 - a) As one seeking harmony, as one having a peaceful spirit, and as one who desires unity and fellowship among the righteous. Men. Better omitted. And holiness. The covering or comprehensive term (*hagiasmon*, "sanctification"). Lord (*kyrion*) is probably more God than Christ. Certainly, one of the essential proofs of new life in Christ lies in the way believers get along with each other.¹
 - b) The exhortation to earnestly seek after peace, has its' rise in the historical background here. Expositors say: "The circumstances of the Hebrews were fitted to excite a quarrelsome spirit, and a feeling of alienation towards those weak members who left the straight path. They must not suffer them to be alienated, but must restore them to the unity of the faith, and in endeavoring to reclaim them, they must use the methods of peace, not of anger or disputation." The exhortation is thus addressed to the saved among the recipients of this letter, and in relation to their attitude towards the saved Jews who were in danger of renouncing their professed faith in the Messiah, and of returning to the temple sacrifices. The holiness spoken of here is defined in the context and by the historical background of this letter.²
2. Pursue peace with all men - When people do evil against us, we tend to instinctively seek vengeance. The writer commands us to instead trust in the power and might of God, just like those he described in chapter 11, so that God fights our battles (Romans 12:14-21). When they are persecuted for their faith, the Lord promises to bless them (James 1:12; Rev. 2:10-11). We must keep the faith and trust God believing Him to be a just God like those in Revelation (Rev. 6:9-11; 16:6-7; 18:24). Jesus faithfully mediates our needs to God (Hebrews 8:1-2), and can sympathize with our weaknesses (Hebrews 4:14-16).

¹ Pfeiffer, C. F., & Harrison, E. F., eds. (1962). [*The Wycliffe Bible Commentary: New Testament*](#) (Heb 12:14). Moody Press.

² Wuest, K. S. (1997). [*Wuest's word studies from the Greek New Testament: for the English reader*](#) (Vol. 10, p. 223). Eerdmans.

- a) Within the community of faith, peace and holiness are inseparable. If peace unites the community through Christ's accomplished work, holiness identifies it as a people who belong to Christ.
3. Pursue peace with all men - When we pursue peace, that means we must depend on the Holy Spirit, who is our peace (John 14:27), to strengthen us from the inside out (1 John 4:4). This is because we are commanded to love God first who then directs us in how to love even those who choose to be our enemies (Mt. 22:36-40; Rom. 12:9-21; 1 John 2:9-10; 4:7-11). This process blesses us to *"work out our salvation in fear and trembling..."* because after all, *"it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure."* (Phil. 2:12-13).
 4. And the sanctification – No matter how emotionally, mentally and spiritually challenging our trials maybe, we must not allow them to distract us from seeking to live holy unto God. We must seek to discipline ourselves to remain consecrated to God. Jesus modeled this mindset when He would repeatedly say, "I must be about My Father's business." Paul, despite the many challenges he encountered remarked on being focused to "press towards the mark." (Phil. 3:12-16) Peter failed, but from his failure, we were taught us to remain sober so that we live in the holiness of God (1 Peter 3:13-16).
 - a) Peace is linked to sanctification and the concept of avoiding sin (12:1). The bitterness arises in the context of persecution. The persecuted person is likely to become bitter toward God, His people, and those who persecute. The result is a backing away from Christian commitment like Esau backed away from his birthright. The Esau illustration sums up the problem that arises throughout the letter—falling away from aggressive faith in Christ. The warning passages throughout have cautioned against facing a time when, like Esau, it would be too late to regain the blessing (cf. 2:1–4; 3:7–4:13; 5:11–6:20; 10:26–31; 12:25–29). Because of Esau's selfish, materialistic desires, he was rejected with respect to the blessing (Gen. 27:30–40).³
 - b) The holiness spoken of here is defined in the context and by the historical background of the letter. Expositors say: "The holiness which this epistle has explained is a drawing near to God with a cleansed conscience (10:14, 22), a true acceptance of Christ's sacrifice as bringing the worshipper into fellowship with God."⁴
 5. Without which no one can see the Lord - When the writer states, "without which no one can see the Lord," he is implying that when the pain of trials become greater than our need to strive for holiness, no one experiences the inner transforming powerful

³ Hughes, R. B., & Laney, J. C. (2001). *Tyndale concise Bible commentary* (p. 673). Tyndale House Publishers.

⁴ Wuest, K. S. (1997). *Wuest's word studies from the Greek New Testament: for the English reader* (Vol. 10, p. 223). Eerdmans.

movement of the Holy Spirit, the Helper of Christ. So, when we say “He who is in us is greater than he who is in the world,” while in the flesh, instead of being conquerors we suppress the ministry of the Holy Spirit and become like “those who shrink back to destruction,” (Hebrews 10:30) because God finds no pleasure in us (Hebrews 10:29).

- a) *“What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace might increase? 2 May it never be! How shall we who died to sin still live in it? 3 Or do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death? 4 Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, in order that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life.”* (Rom 6:1-4; NASB)
 - b) *“For if we have become united with Him in the likeness of His death, certainly we shall be also in the likeness of His resurrection, 6 knowing this, that our old self was crucified with Him, that our body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin; 7 for he who has died is freed from sin. 8 Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him, 9 knowing that Christ, having been raised from the dead, is never to die again; death no longer is master over Him. 10 For the death that He died, He died to sin, once for all; but the life that He lives, He lives to God. 11 Even so consider yourselves to be dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus. 12 Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body that you should obey its lusts, 13 and do not go on presenting the members of your body to sin as instruments of unrighteousness; but present yourselves to God as those alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God. 14 For sin shall not be master over you, for you are not under law, but under grace.”* (Rom 6:5-14; NASB)
6. Without which no one can see the Lord - All of those in chapter 11, placed their faith in God and as a result were able to vividly see God fight for them.

B. See to It..... NO Root (vs. 15-17):

1. See to it that NO ONE come short of the grace of God – We need to continuously, intensely, and carefully exercise oversight over everyone involved in being disciplined by God so that they do not fail to take advantage of God's generous, free-hearted love towards them. This is important because God only disciplines those whom He loves (Hebr. 12:6,8).
 2. See to it that NO ONE comes short of the grace of God – Since the Lord is actually loving us as He disciplines us, we are to continuously "strengthen the hands that are weak and the knees that are feeble, and make straight paths.... so that the lame may not be put out of joint, but rather be healed." This blesses those who are weak and broken to continuously experience God's free-hearted bountiful love.
 3. So that no root of bitterness springs up – Some people, like those in chapter 10:32-29 who are told not to "shrink back to their destruction," in their weakness (Hebr. 4:14-15), because in the midst of these trials they became lukewarm Christians (Hebr. 5:11-12), even denying the faith (Hebr. 6:4-8), and can become extremely wicked, envious and even jealous of those who continue to practice the faith, continuously, experiencing the powerful movement of the Holy Spirit within them (Hebrews 5:13-14) and a victorious Christian life.
- a) If they renounced their professed faith in the Messiah as High Priest and returned to the temple sacrifices, it would be impossible to renew them again to repentance. They should take a warning from the case of Esau, who could not get himself to repent of his misdeed. We might observe in passing that there are just two sins spoken of in the New Testament, the commission of which puts the performer in a place where he is incapable of being saved, the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit (Matt. 12:22–32), and the sin of Hebrews 6:6, neither of which can be committed today, since the conditions existent in the first century do not apply today. In the case of the sin against the Holy Spirit, the Lord Jesus is not here in humiliation performing miracles as a divine attestation of His mission, and in the case of the falling away of Hebrews 6:6, the temple sacrifices are not being offered in Jerusalem. Both of these sins render the heart so hard that the person is impervious to the pleadings of the Holy Spirit. All of which means that there is no person today who is beyond the reach of the Holy Spirit and the Word of God. We can, therefore, preach and teach with the confidence that the Holy Spirit and the Word can reach any sinner with whom we are dealing.⁵

⁵ Wuest, K. S. (1997). [*Wuest's word studies from the Greek New Testament: for the English reader*](#) (Vol. 10, pp. 225–226). Eerdmans.

4. So that no root of bitterness springs up - When people fail to experience or embrace the abundant grace of God, especially in times of weakness, they can become resentful, jealous, and envious. If left unchecked, these attitudes can take root and grow into extreme wickedness that is offensive to God and harmful to everyone around them. Therefore, we must rely on the power of God at work within us to uproot bitterness, cultivate forgiveness, and live in a way that reflects His grace.
 - a) In the metaphorical expression ῥίζα πικρίας, “bitter root,” the genitive of quality describes the root as one that produces bitter or poisonous fruit (BDF §165; BAGD 657; Michel, 454–55). The phrase ἄνω φύουσα, “growing up,” describes the root as living; it sprouts and produces noxious fruit (cf. 6:8). The citation of Deut. 29:17b LXX shows that the metaphor refers to a stubborn disposition that expresses itself in unbelief and apostasy. The clause in v 15b is thus parallel with the clause in v 15a: both clauses refer to arrogant unbelief and apostasy. Stubbornness, when it grows, produces the noxious fruit of apostasy, which is equivalent to excluding oneself from the grace of God. The urgent warning recalls 3:7–19, and especially 3:12, which refers to an evil heart of unbelief that leads one to turn away from the living God (cf. F. F. Bruce, 366; Andriessen and Lenglet, *Bib* 51 [1970] 266; Casey, “Eschatology in Heb 12:14–29,” 110–12; the interpretation of Michel [455], who identifies the bitter sprout as a metaphor for an anti-Christ who opposes himself to the “Sprout of Jesse,” the Christ, fails to restrict the interpretation of the text to the context established by the citation of Deut. 29:17b LXX).⁶
5. Causes Trouble – When individuals fail to trust in the grace of God, they can create hardship for themselves and others. Their unbelief and bitterness may lead to spiritual instability, resulting in greater affliction and suffering, as warned in **Hebrews 10:37–39**.
6. Many be defiled – These individuals are not just afflicted; the pain of being disciplined by God, because His permissive will allowed them to experience hardship, can cause them to become polluted by the stain of the world (Hebrews 6:4-9).
 - a) The writer previously used the cognate term ἀμίαντος, “undefiled,” “unstained,” in its cultic nuance to describe the character of Jesus as high priest (7:26). It is used again with a distinctly moral nuance to describe the intimacy of marriage (13:4).⁷
 - b) Apostasy within the church house would pose the threat of defiling the entire assembly because it would obscure its’ character as the holy community within a society devoid of the knowledge of God. It would disparage peace and holiness because it springs from a root that is alien to Christ. Viewed in the perspective of Deut. 29:17b, the second μή τις clause contains an explicit warning against apostasy (Johnsson, “Defilement,” 367; Käsemann, “Hebräer 12,12–17,” 311).⁸

⁶ Lane, W. L. (1991). [Hebrews 9–13](#) (Vol. 47B, pp. 453–454). Word, Incorporated.

⁷ Lane, W. L. (1991). [Hebrews 9–13](#) (Vol. 47B, p. 454). Word, Incorporated.

⁸ Lane, W. L. (1991). [Hebrews 9–13](#) (Vol. 47B, p. 454). Word, Incorporated.

7. Immoral godless person like Esau – Esau is an example of a person, who while being disciplined by God for the manner by which he lived, became so corrupted, he sold his birthright for a pot of stew. He became so corrupted by his behavior that he had no reverence for God.
 - a) Here the author had in mind Deuteronomy 29:18 where an Old-Covenant apostate was called a “root ... that produces such bitter poison.” Such a person would be godless (*bebēlos*, “profane, unhallowed, desecrated”) like Esau, Jacob’s brother, whose loose and profane character led him to sell his inheritance rights as the oldest son for the temporary gratification of a single meal.⁹
 - b) The word translated “godless” describes something that is unholy or base. Esau was godless because of his misplaced values, shown by his emphasis on food; in this Old Testament incident Esau betrays a heart that does not value the greater values of God.¹⁰

8. When Esau desired to inherit a blessing – Esau continuously sought to regain his birthright from Jacob (Gen. 27:30-40), but was rejected. “He cries out with “an exceedingly great and bitter cry,” but it was to no avail. Esau **bore a grudge against Jacob because of the blessing with which his father had blessed him.**” (Gen. 27:41). This helps us to understand what a lack of grace can do to someone when they are disciplined by the Lord.
 - a) Esau serves as the example of the hopelessness of such a condition. By his own choice he became a profane person, or lover of the earthly and sensual things, so that he lost both birthright and spiritual sensitivity. This latter condition, particularly, is the antithesis of the standard held up in verse 14. Esau exchanged peace and holiness for immediate and earthly pleasures.¹¹ Moses forsook it (Hebrews 11:25-29).
 - b) Jesus is the essential Son who has been appointed heir of all things (1:2, 4); Christians are those who enjoy the status of “sons” through Him (2:10) and so they will inherit the divine promises (1:4; 6:12, 17–18; 9:15).¹²
 - c) Inheritance rights as the oldest son (12:16). The receiving of an inheritance from one’s father was a socio-legal practice throughout the ancient world. Deuteronomy 21:16–17 says that a firstborn son receives a double portion of the father’s inheritance, and

⁹ Hodges, Z. C. (1985). [Hebrews](#). In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 2, pp. 810–811). Victor Books.

¹⁰ Arnold, C. E. (2002). [Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary: Hebrews to Revelation](#). (Vol. 4, p. 76). Zondervan.

¹¹ Pfeiffer, C. F., & Harrison, E. F., eds. (1962). [The Wycliffe Bible Commentary: New Testament](#) (Heb 12:16). Moody Press.

¹² Lane, W. L. (1991). [Hebrews 9–13](#) (Vol. 47B, p. 456). Word, Incorporated.

this is what Esau treated so lightly (Gen. 25:29–34).¹³ Different from the story of the prodigal son.

9. He found no place for repentance - No matter what scrutiny Esau applied to his dilemma, reaching out to his brother and his father, there was no change of mind from either his brother or his father.
 - a) It indicates that the example of Esau has been cited because it has direct bearing on the question whether repentance is possible after willful apostasy.¹⁴
 - b) A reckless disregard for God and His gifts is reprehensible, because it entails a willful rejection of a divine vocation. This is the essence of apostasy. By descriptive analogy, there can be no opportunity for repentance for the Christian who renounces his “heavenly calling” (3:1) or who shows contempt for the blessings of the new covenant secured by Jesus’ sacrificial death upon the cross. There remains only the certainty of an inescapable judgment and rejection by God.¹⁵

10. Sought for with tears – It did not matter how exhausting his appeal to his brother or father was: there was no change of mind, so he continually expressed hatred to his brother for a long time until they were both older men with families (Gen. 32-33).
 - a) When Esau attempted to change his condition, he found it impossible to do so. Whether the blessing of God or repentance was the object of his tears, it was too late. Esau was guilty of willful sin, from the consequences of which he found no deliverance. This is the lesson to the Hebrews who were contemplating an act of willful sin in the form of apostasy that went back to the Mosaic tradition. To the writer the illustration-warning seemed obvious.¹⁶

11. Exercise grace – This story of Jacob and Esau should inspire us to pursue peace. This is only possible with a dependence on the ministry of the Holy Spirit in our lives (John 14:26; Phil. 2:12-13).

¹³ Arnold, C. E. (2002). *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary: Hebrews to Revelation*. (Vol. 4, p. 76). Zondervan.

¹⁴ Lane, W. L. (1991). *Hebrews 9–13* (Vol. 47B, p. 457). Word, Incorporated.

¹⁵ Lane, W. L. (1991). *Hebrews 9–13* (Vol. 47B, pp. 458–459). Word, Incorporated.

¹⁶ Pfeiffer, C. F., & Harrison, E. F., eds. (1962). *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary: New Testament* (Heb 12:16). Moody Press.