

Hebrews 12:14-29

¹⁴Strive for peace with everyone, and for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord. ¹⁵See 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; ¹⁶that no one is sexually immoral or unholy like Esau, who sold his birthright for a single meal. ¹⁷For 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.

1. V 14: Strive for peace, don't wait for it. Actively seek it, without compromising the truth. (TLSB 2125)
2. V 14: In Christ we are already holy/set-apart. At the same time, while we already have this status in the eyes of God, we should strive to be holy here and now. Thus, “holy” is a God-given status in Christ and “holy” is way of life which affirms our status at the same time. In the second sense here, it is sanctification, holiness of life (sanctification in the narrow sense); the way we live in Christ.
3. V 14: “without which no one will see the Lord”: Seeing God face-to-face...

1 Corinthians 13:12: ¹²For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known.

1 John 3:2-3: ²Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is. ³And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure.

1 Corinthians 6:9-11: ⁹Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, ¹⁰nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. ¹¹And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.

4. V 15: How would one fail to obtain God's grace? Answer: By not repenting.
5. V 15: “root of bitterness” = “Those who lose God's grace suffer eternal damage for themselves and pose a very real danger for others. In Deuteronomy 29:18 Moses, speaking about defection from the Lord in the camp of Israel, warned, ‘Make sure there is no root among you that produces such bitter poison.’ The author of Hebrews borrows the picture to warn against the same sin. Defection from Christ is like some poisonous root in the ground. Slowly it grows, eventually spreading its contamination also to its surroundings. Were any of those Hebrew Christians thinking of leaving? ‘Watch out,’ the author warns. Such defection is contagious. It

troubles others and eventually makes them unfit to stand in God's presence when faith is lost." (Lauersdorf, *Hebrews*, 160-161)

6. V 16: "sexually immoral"... Kleinig points out that the holiness the preacher mentioned at verse 14 is threatened by three things presented in verses 15-16:
 - A. Failing to obtain the grace of God/missing out on the grace of God which is a lack of endurance. (12:15) By falling behind and dropping out of the race. (Kleinig, 625)
 - B. Permitting the "root of bitterness" we just discussed. (v 15)
 - C. Now "The third threat to the communal pursuit of peace and sanctification comes from a member who is 'a fornicator or unholy person.' The comparison with Esau shows that these terms do not describe two separate classes of people, an 'either...or,' but a 'both...and,' someone who desecrates his holiness by sexual intercourse outside marriage. In the late Jewish tradition Esau was the proverbial case of this misbehavior. His sexual relationships with two heathen Hittite women were regarded as illegitimate, de facto partnerships rather than legitimate marriages, because they did not have the approval and blessing of his parents...By his sexual union with these unclean pagan women, Esau desecrated his holiness as a member of God's kinfolk." Kleinig, 626)

But why mention the birthright scene in Genesis? "...Esau, who sold his birthright for a single meal."??? Because sexual immorality like Esau immediate desire for stew is about immediate gratification. He was willing to sell his birthright for immediate satisfaction of his appetite.

7. V 17 As a result, Esau lost his platform for true repentance. Here the TLSB quotes Luther:

"It is clear how the passage in Heb. 12:16-17 is to be understood...God, who does not deceive or lie, has offered His mercy to all men who truly repent; and repentance for sin always finds room before God...But there is another repentance that is...false...namely, when I repent in such a way that I am not ashamed of having offended God but am ashamed because I have done harm to myself" (AE 5:151-52)

Please discuss the difference.

A Kingdom That Cannot Be Shaken

¹⁸ For you have not come to what may be touched, a blazing fire and darkness and gloom and a tempest ¹⁹ and the sound of a trumpet and a voice whose words made the hearers beg that no further messages be spoken to them. ²⁰ For they could not endure the order that

was given, “If even a beast touches the mountain, it shall be stoned.”²¹ Indeed, so terrifying was the sight that Moses said, “I tremble with fear.”

8. TLSB 2125: “12:18-21 Describes the institution of old covenant services on Mount Sinai. This is contrasted with the institution of new covenant worship on Mount Zion (vv 22-24).”

Luke 22:19-20: ¹⁹And he took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to them, saying, “This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me.”

²⁰And likewise the cup after they had eaten, saying, “This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood.

9. That is, once upon a time, there was no immediate access to God. “Don’t touch!” was the bottom line.
10. Lauersdorf: “Is that what the readers/[the hearers of the sermon] wanted? Did they really want to return to Judaism with its old covenant of the law? The law with its thunder and trumpets can provide no pardon for sin-troubled hearts or peace for sin-torn consciences. All it offers is the awesome revelation of God’s righteous requirements and the horrible fear of his just punishment over infractions. All it can do is point out the impassable and impossible distance sin puts between man and God, but the law can offer nothing to bridge the gap.” (163-164)
11. But our great High Priest has changed our coming before the LORD. We now have contact, touch, access and communion.
12. So, vss 22-24 provide the contrast to our new status in Christ.

²²But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering, ²³and to the assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect, ²⁴and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel.

13. V 22: You Christians are no longer on Mt. Sinai, but we have arrived to Mt. Zion. The origins of “Mt. Zion” refer to the whole walled town that covered the SE hill of Jerusalem, since the same v. [2 Sam. 5:7: ⁷Nevertheless, David took the stronghold of Zion, that is, the city of David.] goes on to identify Zion with ‘the City of David,’...presumably the once Canaanitish city as it existed at the time of its capture by David in 1003 B.C.” (*Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*, Volume 5, 1063) From this origin of the term “Mt. Zion” we have a synonym for Jerusalem, and from there the Scriptures teach a “New Jerusalem,” so that “Mt. Zion” may also describe the heavenly city, New Jerusalem. In addition, “Mt. Zion” – since it includes all

Christians who have been promised their glorious inheritance – also refers to The Church. Thus, “Mt. Zion” is both the church triumphant in heaven and the church militant on earth; and it is the whole Church visible and invisible.

14. In Christ, “you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem...”. This is your inheritance in Christ. You are in Christ already counted as a citizen of the glorious Mt. Zion.
15. The festivals in the Old Testament always kept God and His blessings before the eyes of His people. In glory, we are in a “festal gathering” (verse 22), AND in the place with “innumerable angels.” Soak that in. In glory, we are not just with all the saints, but with all the angels and both cannot be counted.
16. V 23: “Assembly” is a “congregation”... sound familiar? We will be in the eternal Church of God. Most importantly, in glory we are with God!
17. But not just any assembly, but “the assembly of the firstborn.” In the OT, the “firstborn” had a special status. Christ, is the most prominent of all firstborn. Recall Hebrews 1:6:

⁶And again, when he brings the firstborn into the world, he says,

“Let all God’s angels worship him.”

18. But you have been united to this Firstborn, so that what is His is yours and what is yours is His. Thus, now YOU have the status of “firstborn.” All Christians in heaven and in the New Jerusalem with glorious bodies are the firstborn of God.
19. V 23 “and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect”: note that here in this verse God is identified as “the judge of all.” In Christ, how has He judged you? You are covered in Christ, therefore in the eyes of God, you are perfect, whole, complete, holy, set-apart...God does not see your sin, since Christ is your perfect covering. Thus, the preacher in Hebrews refers to the Christians in glory, “the spirits of the righteous made perfect”.
20. V 24 That is all of this has been made possible by “Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood”. Abel’s blood cried out for vengeance, but the blood of Jesus cries out for our forgiveness.

²⁵ See that you do not refuse him who is speaking. For if they did not escape when they refused him who warned them on earth, much less will we escape if we reject him who warns from heaven. ²⁶ At that time his voice shook the earth, but now he has promised, “Yet once more I will shake not only the earth but also the heavens.” ²⁷ This phrase, “Yet once more,” indicates the removal of things that are shaken—that is, things that have been

made—in order that the things that cannot be shaken may remain. ²⁸Therefore let us be grateful for receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, and thus let us offer to God acceptable worship, with reverence and awe, ²⁹for our God is a consuming fire.

21. V 25 We must listen to God. God is to this day actively speaking: “do not refuse him who is speaking.” How does He speak to us today and how is He the One “who warns [to this day] from heaven”? Answer: Through His Word His prophets, apostles, and evangelists continue to speak to us.

22. What is God’s warning from heaven? Answer: Repent!

23. V 26 The Day is coming that the LORD will shake the earth AND the heavens. What is that day? Answer: The Last Day/The Second Coming of Christ.

24. V 27 All things are going to be made new. Revelation 21:

The New Heaven and the New Earth

21 Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. ²And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. ³And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. ⁴He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.”

⁵And he who was seated on the throne said, “Behold, I am making all things new.

25. V 28 Hebrews 12 ends with the “Therefore” (the sentence flows into the last verse 29)...this then is how we should live:

- A. Grateful to God
- B. Worship God
- C. Revere God
- D. Have awe for God

*** These words have great impact on how we worship in the Divine Service. TLSB 2127: “Not frivolous, nonchalant, or trivial. God’s presence calls for serious hearing, genuine repentance, and extraordinary joy.”

Psalm 2:12: ¹²Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and you perish in the way, for his wrath is quickly kindled. Blessed are all who take refuge in him.

26. V 29 Point of fact, “for our God is a consuming fire” “He will destroy whatever is useless and contrary to Himself.” (TLSB 2127)