

Run With Endurance 9

Open your Bible with me if you would again to Hebrews chapter 12, as we continue our wonderful journey through this letter together.

If you were here last week, you remember that I began the message there with a familiar angelic announcement of the birth of Christ. And this morning I want to look at a second announcement of his birth that also ties in well with where we'll be in Hebrews this morning.

You remember that Joseph initially was going to quietly divorce Mary and put her away when he found out that she was pregnant until an angel of the Lord comes and shares this with him in Matthew 1, verses 20 to 21: *"²⁰ But when he had considered this, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, 'Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife; for the Child who has been conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit. (Listen to verse 21) ²¹ She will bear a Son; and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins.'*"

What a wonderful, glorious statement. He will save His people from their sins. Notice the name, that special name to be given to this baby boy would be Jesus. That is Yahweh saves. And the reason that that name is the appropriate name for Him is because what He's going to do is save His people from their sins.

What does that mean? You know, that is a common statement that we make in Christian circles. When were you saved? Have you been saved? And yet often when I ask the question of a person, what does it mean when we say we're saved from sin, describe that. What exactly has Christ saved us from? And many struggle to really articulate what we mean by the phrase that we are saved.

But the answer really comes in the form of two words that begin with a "P". Christ has saved us from sin's penalty and from sin's power. From sin's penalty in the sense that our sins have a real consequence. We deserve a penalty, a penalty of death, not just death in this temporal life, but eternal death in hell. And Christ paid that penalty for sin on the cross, taking the wrath of the Father on Himself.

So we are saved from the penalty of sin, but also we're saved from sin's power. That is, while we will not be perfect in this life, we are now as believers freed from the power of sin so that we're no longer enslaved to its lust, to do its bidding, but we can, by God's grace, choose to obey in increasing measure. We will choose to obey and grow in holiness. And therefore we are saved by Christ from sin's penalty and its power.

What Christ is doing then, as we know from Ephesians 5, is he is sanctifying his bride. He is preparing us to be a people fit for heaven without any spot or wrinkle or blemish or any such thing.

A people characterized by holiness and righteousness so that we can live with Him in perfect fellowship with the holy God. And it is this very theme that's laid before us in Hebrews

chapter 12 and the second half of verse 14 today. We will learn of the gift and the necessity of holiness in the Christian life. The gift and the necessity of holiness in the Christian life.

If you haven't been with us, I'm just quickly going to give us sort of a flyby of where we have been. The theme of Hebrews, of course, **The Superiority of Christ**. We've seen that proven in the ways that are there on your screen. He is superior to all things. And therefore, we should have an unwavering faith in this Christ.

In chapter 12 specifically, we have seen in the first couple of verses that we're to **Run Faith's Race with Endurance**. The command after that is to **Consider Christ's Enduring Faith**. That He's the perfect example of what it is to have faith. We're then instructed to remember that we're to **Battle Sin unto Death** and **Embrace God's Fatherly Discipline**. We are given the instruction that **God's Discipline Motivates Endurance**. And God's discipline serves a purpose. Four purposes to be exact in Scripture of the discipline of the Lord. Those are there on your screen.

And this culminated in verses seven to 11 with three encouragements. Encouragement number one, **God's Discipline Affirms Our Adoption**. Because we receive His discipline, it means He sees Himself as our Father and we as His children. And that in and of itself is to be an encouragement. **God's Discipline Deserves Our Submission**. And finally, **God's Discipline Produces Our Sanctification**. And it is this third encouragement that we'll see pop up again in our passage today. As we learn there that one of His desires and discipline is to share His holiness with us. That we would be transformed and conformed to the image of Christ.

Now as we've come to verses 12 to 17, we're applying all of those rich truths that we have learned. Let's read together this entire section verses 12 to 17: *"¹² Therefore, strengthen the hands that are weak and the knees that are feeble,¹³ and make straight paths for your feet, so that the limb which is lame may not be put out of joint, but rather be healed. ¹⁴ Pursue peace with all men, and the sanctification without which no one will see the Lord. ¹⁵ See to it that no one comes short of the grace of God; that no root of bitterness springing up causes trouble, and by it many be defiled; ¹⁶ that there be no immoral or godless person like Esau, who sold his own birthright for a single meal.¹⁷ For you know that even afterwards, when he desired to inherit the blessing, he was rejected, for he found no place for repentance, though he sought for it with tears."*

The theme that we've been unpacking is simply this: **Understanding God's discipline strengthens us to take heart and run with endurance!** Take heart and run with endurance.

Remember there are three commands in these verses that then outline four responses to the Fatherly discipline of God. Response number one, **Take Heart** in verse 12. That flows out of the command strengthen. Strengthen the hands that are weak. We are to strengthen ourselves when we're spiritually fatigued by preaching the truth to ourselves.

Response number two, **Run Straight**, which flows out of the command make straight paths for your feet. As we saw when we studied that that means to run the path of obedience to not only believe the truth, verse 12, but to obey the truth, verse 13. Verse 14, we began last week. There's another command that gives two more responses.

We are to **Pursue Peace** as we saw last Sunday and today **Pursue Holiness**. Pursue holiness or sanctification. Remember last week in the first half of verse 14 we learned that we're to pursue peace, meaning we as Christians are to proactively strive to be at peace with all men, that is, in the church and outside the church.

If you weren't here last week, I encourage you to go back and listen to that because the pursuit of peace in our lives, one, is a great necessity for the unity of the body of Christ inside the church and it's a great opportunity to share the gospel of Christ outside the church as we pursue peace with all men. So please go and listen to that if you haven't had a chance to hear it.

But now we come to the fourth response in the second half of verse 14. Pursue holiness. Pursue holiness. Now remember in verse 12 it begins with that word "therefore" and we're still working off of that word therefore. This is now the third command that flows out of that word "therefore" meaning all of the things we learned in verses 1 to 11 should now overflow into these commands. And specifically, the command here in verse 14 is the same command this week as it was last week the word "pursue". Pursue.

And just in case you weren't with us let me remind you this word, this Greek word, is not a casual pursuit, but we could translate it as to strive for something. It is a present, active, imperative, grammatically meaning in the present tense it is continual-this is to be the continual pattern of our lives. It is active-that is we must give our intentional will our action towards this. And finally, it's an imperative, meaning it's a command so it's not optional for the Christian. This is to be categorically who we are giving our intentional effort, striving towards these two things: first of all, last week, peace, pursue peace. But now we read there is a second thing that we're to pursue in verse 14, pursue peace with all men and secondly the sanctification without which no one will see the Lord.

So one command with two objects pursue peace and pursue sanctification. Now the word sanctification is the Greek word for holiness but when it's used in this particular sense it refers to this theological term of sanctification. And I know I've talked about sanctification in in weeks past but I think it's crucial that we make sure we understand this theological reality in order to gain the full impact of what is said here to us.

And so let me talk just for a moment about this term sanctification before we dive into it and apply it. So sanctification is used in Scripture in two different ways. First of all, it is used to describe what we call "positional sanctification". That is a reference to the fact that God has set us apart if we are in Christ He has set us apart as holy. The word sanctification deals with holiness. We are set apart unto God as holy and this is an aspect that flows out of "justification". Another key theological word, we are justified, that is, declared righteous.

Picture the courtroom of God, when you are redeemed through repentance and faith in Christ it's as if in the courtroom of God there's this declaration from God the Father that this one is righteous because not that there's righteousness within them but the righteousness of His Son is applied to them forever. That is justification. There is this great exchange that takes place in which our sin is imputed to Christ and His righteousness is imputed to us and

in that great exchange we are justified, declared righteous. In conjunction with that is this sense of sanctification positionally. We are set apart as holy unto God.

We see this sanctification described in places like 2 Corinthians 5:21 This is justification: *"²¹ He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him."*

In conjunction with that justification is this positional sanctification. 1 Corinthians 1:30 *"³⁰ But by His doing you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption,"*

1 Corinthians 6: 11: *"¹¹ Such were some of you; (speaking of this long list of sins) but you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God."*

So all of these are passages that deal with this positional sense in which we are sanctified and set apart as holy never to be undone. This is why, by the way, the Bible can refer to Christians as saints. It is this idea of being set apart as holy by God and unto God.

Now that brings us to a second kind of sanctification that also begins with a "P". This is "progressive sanctification" and unlike positional sanctification, that one time reality that happens in conjunction with justification, progressive sanctification is an ongoing reality in the life of the Christian. This is the continual pursuit of holiness.

This is the work of God that is going on in your life right now. If you're in Christ in which He is everyday helping to mold you and correct you and guide you by His word that you might be more and more like Christ. It's happening in real time. It's happening all the time. And it will culminate, this progressive sanctification, in one final theological reality we call "glorification", when Christ either brings us home in death or He returns Himself, either way we will then be glorified, that is, completely fully made holy in every sense of the term without spot or wrinkle or blemish or any such thing.

Now honestly, we could just stop there and go to lunch and talk about those realities because that is really the plan of redemption right there. The wonderful plan of redemption of what God has done for us in Christ. It boggles the mind.

But we have to stop and ask ourselves the question what kind of sanctification is referred to here in our passage in verse 14. And to answer that all you have to do is consider the command. What's the command? Pursue. Pursue the sanctification without which no one will see the Lord. Now if we are called here to actively pursue sanctification then what kind of sanctification must this be referring to? The progressive aspect of sanctification. The scriptures never call us to pursue that positional sense of sanctification because it's already happened as a one-time act in the past. But the scriptures do call us over and over again to pursue sanctification in this progressive sense. And that's what we have here in this command. It's something we are to strive for.

Now that brings up another theological truth that we have to understand quickly to describe the difference between positional and progressive sanctification. And I bring this up because it is a question I often get that's confusing as we think about these things. Positional sanctification is what we call a monergistic act. Monergistic. That is only one active agent is involved. There's one person doing the work. And in this case, it is God. God sanctifies. Sets us apart as holy.

We're not called to participate in that positional sanctification. It is something God accomplishes by His grace on our behalf in conjunction with justification. As I read earlier 1 Corinthians 6:11 notice all of these are in the past tense:

"¹¹ Such were some of you; but you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ."

These things have already been done. God did it all on His own for us by grace through faith.

But now we come to progressive sanctification and we have a different word. This is a synergistic act. Synergistic. That is to work together. In progressive sanctification God is still the active agent, and let me be clear, without the work of God there is no sanctification. We will not be made holy in any sense of the word if God is not at work in us.

But the Bible consistently commands us to give our effort towards this progressive sanctification and therefore it presents progressive sanctification as this synergism in which God is at work in us but we are also called to give our maximum effort, to strive for growth and holiness. Ongoing, day in, day out effort.

Now let me just read a couple of passages that highlight this. My favorite I think is that's super clear on this synergistic idea is Philippians 2:12-13, which begins with a command to us.

"¹² So then, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, (here's the command) work out your salvation with fear and trembling;"

There it is. Work out your salvation in the sense of let salvation have its maximum result to bear fruit in your life pursue holiness. But verse 13 focuses on the work of God:

"for it is God who is at work in you both to will and to work for His good pleasure."

In giving our effort to work out our salvation why would we have any confidence that that's going to do anything, that that's going to change anything about us? It's because God is at work in us both to will, that is to give the desire for the pursuit, and to work, to give us that strength to actually accomplish the work in the pursuit of holiness and so we see we are commanded to pursue this and yet it's only going to be accomplished because God is at work in us.

Quickly we see the same reality in 1 Thessalonians 4 verses 1- 6, here it says:

"Finally then, brethren, we request and exhort you in the Lord Jesus, that as you received from us instruction as to how you ought to walk and please God (just as you actually do walk), that you excel still more. (That is, you are obeying, you are growing, but don't stop, don't rest, keep excelling in pursuing holiness) ² For you know what commandments we gave

you by the authority of the Lord Jesus. (and if you're one of those people that's wondering what God's will is for your life here it is, verse 3) ³ *For this is the will of God, your sanctification;* (this is God's will for you every Christian in this room your sanctification in this case he focuses on an aspect of sanctification in the area of purity) *that you abstain from sexual immorality;*" and he goes on to lay that out.

So, while it is true that God ultimately is the one who sanctifies us there's no way to get around the fact that the Bible is crystal clear we are commanded to give our effort in the pursuit of holiness. Pursue sanctification. So the question is does this describe you this morning? Does it describe me?

I think to help us with that, let's consider a few probing questions. Let me ask how frequently do you squelch your conscience, that is your conscience is convicting you and you choose to push it down and seek to quiet its voice?

How actively do you put sinful thoughts to death? When you notice that you're dwelling on things that are sinful and displeasing to the Lord, how quickly do you deal with your thoughts, putting off those thoughts and putting on righteous thoughts? Or do you let them linger?

How careful are you to guard your mouth from sinful speech? Are you careful and thoughtful about the words you allow to flow out of your mouth, to see are they honoring to the Lord?

How carefully do you consider your manner of life and check it against God's word? Do you hold your life up to the plumb line of God's word and say anything that's not plumb with what God's word says, it's got to go, I've got to cut that out of my life because His word is the standard?

How quick are you to confess your sin both to God and to others? Can you honestly say that your life is characterized more by the fruit of the Spirit today than it was a year ago? Can you see a progression in your life, by God's grace, of growth in the fruit of the Spirit?

How consistently do you die to self and prefer others in your daily life? How seriously do you plan for holiness, active plans for how you're going to win the battle as temptation comes?

And finally, is the word of God richly dwelling within you? Can you honestly say the word of God dwells within you because you've disciplined yourself to meditate on the word of God, to hide it in your heart that you may not sin against Him?

Just a few probing questions as we consider how seriously are we really about pursuing sanctification.

You know God has not designed the Christian life in such a way that these things just happen to us without effort. That'd be nice, wouldn't it? And one day, by God's grace, He's going to complete that work in glorification but here in this progressive process He has said

you must put forth your effort. He commands us to get up, and to run hard, to read the word, meditate on the word, discipline ourselves to pray to go to war with our sin.

You know I was in college ministry for a long time and I remember on a trip one time in the van, one of the students asked me the question. It's a good question. Why is it that some Christians seem to mature faster than others? Why is it that you can have two Christians, for example, that have been in Christ for the same length of time and yet one of them seems to be still an infant in their knowledge and an infant in their character, and the other seems to be wise in the word and to have gained much victory over sin in their lives? Why is this?

And I said well, it can only be the effort that each of them is putting into knowing God and obeying His commands because God is never faithless, ever. God never fails to keep up His part of the deal to be stirring up the will and to be giving the strength that is needed so the only part of the equation that gets malfunctioning, if this is a true believer, is they are not putting forth the same amount of effort as the other person is. God hasn't changed. God has not failed.

The Bible is clear that we must take this pursuit seriously: 1 Timothy 4 7-8: *"⁷ But have nothing to do with worldly fables fit only for old women. On the other hand, discipline yourself for the purpose of godliness (discipline yourself for the purpose of godliness); ⁸ for bodily discipline is only of little profit, but godliness is profitable for all things, since it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come."*

So Christian, how seriously have you disciplined yourself for the purpose of godliness? Have you fallen into the misconception that God is just going to zap you with a beam of holiness and one day, you just got to wait long enough, but one day you'll wake up and you won't be selfish? One day I'll wake up and I'm going to be humble because God's just going to do it to me? Is that what we're waiting on? Are you blaming your struggles with things like purity on I'm just waiting on God to change me or are you actively striving for these things?

Do you pursue sanctification? And here's an honest question we have to consider along these lines, what keeps us from pursuing sanctification? What hinders us, what holds us back?

Similarly to last week when we looked at hindrances to pursuing peace with all men, I want us to consider four common hindrances to the pursuit of sanctification, and these are just taken from my own personal experience in life, as well as pastoral ministry and helping others. These are four common things that I have seen. There are many others we can add, but four common things that often hinder us in the pursuit of sanctification.

Number one we'll call **Sinful Deception**, sinful deception. Perhaps the most obvious hindrance to the pursuit of sanctification is when we give in to the deception of sin. Sin is always deceptive. It's always a shiny object promising joy and happiness and pleasure, and when you bite that shiny object what you always find is that it only delivers pain and destruction and despair. So when we give in to the deceptive allure of sin we believe a lie, and when we believe a lie then we open ourselves to giving in to that sin, and our progress in sanctification is slowed and it is stunted because we're walking in the deception of sin.

And so the key to that is then to preach the truth to ourselves. This is why Paul says in Philippians 4 that we're to dwell on certain things: *"⁸ Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, (here's the command) dwell on these things"*.

Fill your mind with these things. And the truth, this is what I mean by a plumb line of truth. We fill our mind with the truth of God's word and it is this plumb line, and we take every other thought, every wayward thought, and we measure it against that plumb line and anything that's off center gets thrown out, cast away. And we dwell on what is right and true. That's how we stay on the path of obedience as we learned earlier.

So if you want to guard yourself against being deceived by sin, fill your mind with truth so that you more quickly recognize the deception of sin and turn from it to walk on the path of righteousness. Preach the truth to yourself and stop listening to yourself.

Number two we'll call it **Theological Confusion**, theological confusion. Often Christians, I've found in our theological circles especially, are stunted in their victory over sin because they over complicate sanctification. What I mean is this, many people are drawn to expository preaching and reform theology because they're serious about loving God with all their mind, they love to read about theology and think about theology and talk about theology and go deep into God's word in an intellectual sense.

But when it comes to practical living and living out the Christian life and God's commands they often get tripped up because their minds get stuck on what we'll call a theological hamster wheel, and they're just spinning their wheels over things like this. They consume themselves, for example, about trying to understand how sanctification works from a theological sense: is it me or is it God? Well, there's this command that I'm supposed to do this, but I'm promised that God is doing this, and so do I need to do something or is God doing something?

And we stay on this hamster wheel and what's actually not happening is the pursuit of holiness. We're just going round and round, trying to understand what we'll call the secret things, the things that God has chosen not to reveal to us. Deuteronomy 29:29 says: *"²⁹ 'The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our sons forever, that we may observe all the words of this law.'*"

In that command, Moses is telling the people that there are many things that he's just said to them previous to that verse that they do not understand and their temptation is going to be to think about all those things and try to figure them out and what he says is don't do that. Leave the secret things that God has not told you to God and you focus on what He has told you and simply trust Him and obey.

This is the Christian life. It's actually much more simple than we think. It's as simple as God has said this, I will trust him, and I will obey and I'm not going to get stuck on some hamster wheel of theology. Don't get me wrong. Should we love God with all our minds, should we

stretch our minds to the limit to understand all of the revealed things? Absolutely! But when we get into the secret things is where we get trapped and we don't make progress. So if that's you, if you're tempted towards that, let me encourage you to get off the hamster wheel and just run, just obey.

Next, we'll say number three, the third hindrance to our sanctification is **Ineffective Strategy**, ineffective strategy. Far and away, one of the most common hindrances to making progress in the pursuit of holiness is a failure to fight in accordance with God's prescribed plan for defeating sin. And this is a particularly frustrating hindrance because often times I'll talk with people who are distraught and genuinely burdened because they believe they're giving their maximum effort to fight but they're not seeing the fruit. They're not seeing the victory that they want to see over sin. So they say I'm pursuing sanctification but where's the fruit, where's the victory?

And in discussing with them how they're fighting, what I often find is that they have a battle plan that is primarily defensive and reactionary. They play defense instead of offense when it comes to sin. What I mean is this, their temptation in fighting sin mentally looks something like this: don't do that, don't say that, oh don't say anything, oh don't do anything, or why am I thinking this way? Why did I feel that feeling that I just felt? What does that mean about me? Am I even a Christian? Would a Christian feel a temptation like that?

These are the kinds of things that they do in their minds and this is the battle plan all day long: stop, don't look there, don't go there, don't do that don't say that, and it's all defensive. Now the problem with that is it's not that it's wrong to stop yourself from sinning. Don't get me wrong. But the plan goes much further than that. And this is something I've taught before, I'm not going to linger here, but it is crucial for us to understand because this is how we win the battle. If we don't understand it, we will be frustrated in the battle of sin. But scripture lays out for us a strategy for fighting sin. We call it the process of change.

It's in Ephesians 4. It really boils down to three steps: put off sin, renew your mind with truth, and put on righteousness. Ephesians 4 20-24: *"²⁰ But you did not learn Christ in this way, ²¹ if indeed you have heard Him and have been taught in Him, just as truth is in Jesus, ²² that, in reference to your former manner of life, you lay aside the old self, which is being corrupted in accordance with the lusts of deceit, ²³ and that you be renewed in the spirit of your mind, ²⁴ and put on the new self, which in the likeness of God has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth."*

So lay aside, put off, verse 22. Be renewed in your mind, verse 23. Put on the new self, verse 24. When we lose the battle with sin it's often because we never make it past step one. Our whole battle plan is just trying not to sin instead of actively seeking to be holy.

So what I'm encouraging you to do, what Paul is encouraging you to do, is to put your efforts in renewing your mind with truth and actively pursuing obedience. The Christian life is not a life of just seeking to not be unrighteous. It is a life seeking to be righteous, and so actually get to the point of putting on. For example, you've heard it said if you can't say

something nice don't say anything at all. The biblical way to say that is if you can't say something nice repent, renew your mind with truth, and speak edifying words timed for the moment to build that person up in Christ. That's put off and put on. The first is just, hey don't say anything. The second is no, renew your mind and speak truth. Obey. Walk in the truth.

So this is what I mean by an effective biblical strategy actively, proactively pursue obedience instead of just trying not to be disobedient. Pursue sanctification.

Finally, this last hindrance we'll call **Circumstantial Delusion**, circumstantial delusion. And this actually fits the context of what's happening here in Hebrews 12. Circumstantial delusion is what's going on to them and why they're beginning to waver in their faith because what I mean by circumstantial delusion is, it's kind of like when God brings a circumstance into your life that is so difficult, so distracting, that it totally disorients you.

Like a boxer who gets punched in the nose in the boxing ring so hard that his eyes are watering, he's seeing stars, he can't even see the man in front of him that he's supposed to be boxing. It is totally taking him off course. Sometimes God providentially brings circumstances into our lives, like persecution in this case, and it rocks our world and our temptation is to feel like I can't fight. I am so off base, I'm so knocked off center, I don't even know how to fight. And so it gives us this sense of justification for sin. My circumstance is just too hard. God, I know what the Bible says I ought to do, but this one's just too difficult.

This is circumstantial delusion and I say delusion because it's not true. The scriptures are clear that we will face suffering, we will face difficulties, but what God says is He is faithful. He's faithful to provide a way of escape and temptation. He is faithful to give us sufficient grace. He is faithful to strengthen us no matter the circumstance to obey Him.

So when you are tempted in your heart in a difficult situation, and you will be tempted to think I just can't do that, understand that is what we're calling circumstantial delusion. Your circumstances have become difficult and you are again, you are giving in to the deception that it's too difficult to obey and God says no, don't forget, it may be too difficult for you, it's not too difficult for Me and I am at work in you.

So putting all this together if we want to pursue sanctification we've got to become skilled at recognizing deception. We've got to obey God, giving our maximum effort, trusting that all things fit within His providential plan for us. We've got to give our effort according to the pattern given in scripture. And finally, we've got to trust God to give us strength to obey even when it feels impossible.

Now the truth is this pursuit of holiness and sanctification is not optional if you're a Christian. It's simply not an option and it's not an option for two reasons, one because we've already said this word "pursue" is an imperative. It's a command, that is God is saying to us directly as believers you and I must do this. But secondly, notice what else he says in verse 14, he says *"pursue the sanctification without which no one will see the Lord."* Whoa. Pursue the sanctification without which no one will see the Lord. The second half of the statement reminds us that holiness is a prerequisite for right fellowship with God. And when he says no

one will see the Lord I believe he means in the sense of when Christ returns. Being with the Lord in perfect fellowship, as it says in 1 John 3:2: *"² Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not appeared as yet what we will be. We know that when He appears, we will be like Him, because we will see Him just as He is."*

This is a description of the fact that when Christ returns we will be made to be like Him, that is, we will be made holy because we will see Him as He is in His full holiness and that can't be possible unless we are fit for holiness as well.

And so this *"sanctification without which no one will see the Lord"* we must have holiness in order to be with Christ forever. Now this presents another one of those theological tensions that I mentioned earlier that often gets people trapped on that theological hamster wheel. So if you're tempted towards that stay with me. Let me just explain what this does and does not mean when he says *"pursues this sanctification without which no one will see the Lord."*

First of all, understand clearly this is not saying that we are saved by our works. In other words, the author is not saying that we must pursue sanctification because that pursuit somehow will secure our redemption, as if it's still in question as to whether or not we are truly redeemed. We are saved by grace through faith in Christ alone. However this verse is highlighting another crucial teaching of scripture which we call the "perseverance of the saints" or the other side of the coin, the way to look at that is the "preservation of the saints." Both of those things are true. The scriptures clearly teach all true Christians will persevere to the end in their faith. They will persevere in the battle with sin, they will continue to fight the good fight until the Lord brings us home.

Richard Phillips says it this way. Listen carefully as he speaks about this passage he says: "Holiness is necessary for us to be saved. (Hang on) It is not necessary as a condition of our acceptance with God, since we are justified by faith in Christ alone, apart from works. But it is necessary as a consequence of our acceptance with God, so much so that the apostle James mocks the idea of being saved by a faith that fails to produce good works "Faith by itself," he writes, "if it does not have works is dead."

The point of the perseverance of the saints and the preservation of the saints is that in redemption, a real change happens. We are really made new and it can't help but bear fruit and continue to bear fruit.

2 Corinthians 5:17: *"¹⁷ Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come."*

Galatians 2:20: *"²⁰ I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me."*

Remember, one of the great purposes for which Christ redeemed us was that we might be holy, that He might make us holy.

Romans 8:29: *"²⁹ For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined to (what?) become conformed to the image of His Son,"* He predestined you not just to rescue you from

the penalty of sin, but from the power of sin, that you might be transformed and conformed to the image of His Son.

Notice in 2 Peter 1:4-7 it says: *"⁴ For by these He has granted to us His precious and magnificent promises, so that by them you may become partakers of the divine nature, (that is that you might be holy made holy as He is holy) having escaped the corruption that is in the world by lust. (And then he goes on to say that that ought to encourage us to give our effort in the battle.) ⁵ Now for this very reason also, applying all diligence, in your faith supply moral excellence, and in your moral excellence, knowledge."* And so on and so forth.

Notice here the connection between God's design to share His holiness with us and the call to pursue holiness actively. Now all of this has a point in context. Why would he even say that we are to pursue this sanctification without which no one will see the Lord? Why not just leave it at pursue peace, pursue sanctification? What is the significance of this final phrase without which no one will see the Lord? Well, I think it will become more clear as we unpack verses 15 to 17. Because what's going to happen over the next few weeks as we are diving back into this issue in the church here being addressed of people tempted to drift away, the danger of apostasy, the danger of leaving the church. Not that a true Christian can ever lose his or her salvation but there are those who profess Christ who ultimately are not in Christ and show that by leaving.

And he's calling the true Christians in the church to double down on your faith and pursue holiness, which is a prerequisite for being right with God and seeing Christ when He returns. And he makes this really clear as he turns his attention specifically to this example of Esau, which we will get to in the coming weeks. But what he's saying is pursue sanctification, because here's the danger of not. This example of a wicked, worldly man, Esau, who chose his own path of sin and rebellion and what did it get him? Notice at the end of verse 17: *"¹⁷ For you know that even afterwards, when he desired to inherit the blessing, he was rejected,"* His pursuit of disobedience and the lack thereof of holiness ended in his rejection.

For a true believer, this is unthinkable, the thought of being without Christ. The thought of not seeing Christ. And so I believe what he is doing here is stirring up in us, sort of awakening us again, to the need to follow Christ, pursue sanctification. Give it all you've got. Run hard. Remember, this is part of being in the family of God, the true people of God are a holy people, progressively being made holy that we might eventually see our Savior face to face, made holy just as He is.

Now as we think about this, we have to be careful. God is always perfectly balanced. That plumb line of truth that we talked about, that God presents many tensions is Scripture and we've got to be careful not to get off on either side of those tensions. Here we've been focusing on the call to pursue sanctification. But the tension that balances that is that God is at work in us. And that is why we have hope. Otherwise we would have no courage, we would have no confidence.

But listen to what God says in Philippians 1:6. Paul says: *"⁶ For I am confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus."*

He will see to it that what He began in you will happen. This is why we also say this is the preservation of the saints.

John 10:27-30: *"²⁷ My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me; ²⁸ and I give eternal life to them, and they will never perish; and no one will snatch them out of My hand. ²⁹ My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand. ³⁰ I and the Father are one."*

And so, must we pursue holiness? Absolutely. But should we ever think that that pursuit will have its effect because of us? Absolutely not.

Now if you're a true Christian, should you ever worry that in the end you might show up and realize you don't get to see Jesus face to face? No. He will see to it that you are who you must be. He has already sanctified you in the positional sense which has guaranteed that He will ultimately sanctify you in glorification. So let that be the wind in your sails to keep running. Keep pursuing.

And so the conclusion of all we've heard is this: strive for holiness. Strive for holiness. As we apply this passage I want you to think of all the wonderful truths that we've learned over the last few months. Think of all those saints in chapter 11 whom God preserved as they fought for faith and God held them fast. Think of your Savior who perfectly obeyed the Father even in the face of such hostility from men. Think of the way that God has committed Himself to share His holiness with you, to the point of disciplining us so that we may follow Him more faithfully. And view this command through that lens, through the faithfulness of your God

The point is if you're a Christian this morning if you're really in Christ then by His grace you can do this. Do you believe that? You can pursue holiness. You are not trapped in your sin. Whatever sin you are in, if you're a true Christian, it does not have its grips on you in an enslaving sense. You are not trapped. You can, by God's grace, choose to obey and to grow. God is at work in you.

Don't believe the lie that you are powerless to change and grow. Have you convinced yourself that your circumstances somehow are different than others? That somehow you get a pass because your life is so hard? Are you hung up on some theological hamster wheel and using it as an excuse not to just get up and run for the Lord? Has your battle plan been all defense and no offense?

This morning may we be encouraged by God's faithfulness to the saints of old, to His faithfulness to His son and His commitment that He will be faithful to us, that we can, by God's grace, grow. We can obey this command by the power of His spirit to pursue sanctification. So what is in your way? What is holding you back? Are you believing lies? What is it? Put that aside, put it off and put on righteousness.

And if you're here this morning and you look at your life and this word holiness doesn't show up anywhere, holiness doesn't characterize you in the slightest way, understand if you are out there in the wilderness of sin and you look at your life and say I'm so far from God,

how can there be hope for me, understand. Look around you in this room, that is where every person here today used to be. Where is the hope for me? I'm so lost in my sin.

The good news of the gospel is you have not run so far in your rebellion against God that His arm cannot reach you. The Lord Jesus Christ gave His own life on the cross to pay the penalty for your sin and He rose from the dead and the Bible says if you will repent of your sins and put your faith in the Lord Jesus Christ you will be saved from both sin's penalty for your sin and its power. This is the good news of the gospel. Do not spend another day lost in the wilderness of sin and rebellion against God. Turn to Him, know His grace and His love and His mercy by humbly repenting of your sin and putting your faith in Christ.