

The Passionate Pursuit of Peace (Hebrews 12:14)

Hebrews 12, beginning at verse 12. We'll read through verse 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. (Heb. 12:12–17 NASB)

There are many areas of the Christian life in which we must walk in a balanced fashion, holding, as it were, two truths or two principles, two ideas in our minds and our hearts at the same time without erring on either side of these things and excluding one over the other.

For instance, we hold and believe that God is absolutely sovereign, and that man is responsible for his sin. We hold and believe that God wrote Scripture. God wrote this Book. We refer to this as the Word of God, and yet we also refer to Paul's writings and Peter's writings and John's writings and we talk about the human authors of Scripture. So we believe that both God wrote this Book and that men wrote this Book. We believe that God has chosen some for salvation from eternity past, and yet we also believe that the gospel is to be preached passionately, indiscriminately, and as prolifically and widely as we are capable of doing. We believe that repentance is a gift of God, sovereignly granted by Him, and yet all men are commanded to repent. We believe that faith is a gift that God sovereignly grants to those whom He has chosen, and yet Scripture commands men to repent and to believe the gospel.

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You see, these are truths, and when we are balancing them, we can fall into a ditch on one side or the other and fall into extremes, and we always have to avoid that. And here is another one. How about your growth in holiness? Is that God's work or is that your work? Is that God's work or is that your work? Now, there might be some here who are inclined to say, "Well, that's my responsibility. You see, God has done everything that He is going to do, and now He has left the rest up to me. It is my job to mortify sin. It's my job to apply the promises of Scripture. It's my job to passionately pursue holiness. I need to do better. I need to be better. God has done everything, and now He's left the rest to me. So if there is any growth in holiness to take place, it rests entirely in my hands, in my life. It is up to my effort to accomplish this." There might be some who would say that, and to that I would say, really? You think you can accomplish that? You think you can kill the sin resident in your heart? You think you can transform your corrupt nature? You think you can mortify your flesh and master your sin and tame your lusts? Do you think it's possible within the power of your own flesh and self-effort to mortify and kill the flesh? Do you really think that?

And then there might be others who would be inclined to say, "It's not all my work; it's all God's work. He does all of it. In fact, the minute I begin to get involved in my own application of holiness and my own pursuit of holiness, that's when things will go off the rails. I'm likely to mess it up. If I get in there and try and be holy, if I try and mortify sin—the best thing to do is just to let go and let God." Have you heard people say that? "Let go and let God." That is one of the stupidest and worst phrases that you could possibly utter. It sounds spiritual. It does. "Let go and let God"—that sounds like, man, if anybody's spiritual in the room, it's me. I'm just letting go and letting God. And to that I would say, really, there's no effort to it whatsoever? You don't have to do anything? There's no sin for you to kill? There's no temptation for you to resist? There's no work that you need to do? You just sit back and coast? There's no striving, no labor, no effort, no cost, no work, no denying, nothing to obey? You're just going to sit back and think that God Himself all alone is going to make you holy?

You see, neither of those answers sounds right, does it? And it's because to answer one way or the other is not right, because in reality, it is a combination of both of those things. It is the work of God, and it is something that we apply ourselves to. So pursuing holiness and becoming sanctified, progressing in sanctification, is something that, yes, God does it, and at the same time, we do it. It is a work in which we cooperate with God in the sense that we apply His grace and we obey Him, and it is God Himself who is doing the work of transforming us and sanctifying us, and the means that He uses is our

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application of His grace and our pursuit of holiness. So these two things go together. You cannot do it without Him, and He will not do it without you. You cannot do it without Him, and He will not do it without you. He has commanded us to obey. He has commanded us to work at it. And so these two things go together. We have to balance both of these. It's God's work and it's my work.

And let me give you three passages of Scripture real quick. This is just before we get into Hebrew 12. Three passages of Scripture where you hear the apostle Paul explain this. Philippians 2:12–13. These are going to be familiar to you. You don't need to turn there. I'm going to read them.

12 So then, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, [listen, this is your work] work out your salvation with fear and trembling;

13 for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure. (NASB)

You work out your own salvation. God is at work in you to do and to will for His good pleasure. Galatians 2: “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” (v. 20). I've been crucified, Paul says. I'm dead. It's no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me. So you ask Paul, “Who's living your Christian life for you, Paul?” He would say, “It's Christ. I've died. Christ lives in me. But the life that I now live in the flesh, I live by faith in the Son of God.” So who's doing the living, Paul or Christ? It's both. Paul says, “I've died, yet I live, yet I don't live. Christ lives in me. He's the one doing the work. And yet I'm exhausted,” Paul would say.

First Corinthians 15:10: “But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me did not prove vain; but I labored even more than all of them, yet not I, but the grace of God with me.” Paul's comparing himself there to the other apostles. He said, “I've worked harder than all of the rest of those who saw the Lord before I did. I have labored, I have strived, I have worked, I have endeavored, I have endured. I am exhausted,” Paul would say. “And yet it's not me, but it's the grace of God within me.” And you have it here in Hebrews 12:14: “Pursue peace with all men, and the sanctification [or holiness] without which no one will see the Lord.”

In this context, we have seen that God is the one who is disciplining His children for their good, for their holiness. God is the one who is doing this so that we might share His

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holiness (Heb. 12:10). He is doing this to produce in us the peaceful fruit of righteousness (Heb. 12:11). So God is the one who is doing the work. He is the one who is causing us to share in His holiness. He is the one who's preparing us for that. And He is the one who's producing the fruit, the peaceful fruit of righteousness in us through discipline.

So who is doing the work in Hebrews 12? Who brings the discipline? God does. God is the one who is doing that work, right? So what are we to do? Let go and let God? No, Hebrews 12:14: "Pursue peace with all men, and the [holiness or] sanctification without which no one will see the Lord." So what is our response to that? God is doing the work. I'm not the one who assigns my own discipline. I'm not the one who chooses what my disciplined life looks like or what difficulties and trials and tribulations and afflictions are going to come into my life. I'm not the one who gets to choose that. You don't get to choose that for me or for you.

So God does that work. And yet we are commanded to pursue holiness in the midst of that discipline. And that command to pursue holiness is the third of five imperatives that come in this list of commands in verses 12–17 of things that you and I are to do in the midst of and as a result of God's discipline. We are to strengthen our weaknesses (v. 12), we are to straighten our paths or our ways (v. 13), and we are to pursue peace and holiness (v. 14). And the next two: we are to guard against bitterness (v. 15), and (v. 17) we are to know the danger of apostasy. These are the five things that we are to do.

Today we're looking at the pursuit of peace. God does this work through discipline so that you and I may share His holiness, and yet we do the work of pursuing, passionately, peace with all men, and sanctification without which no one will see the Lord. Notice in verse 14 that we have before us two things which are the objects of our pursuit: peace with all men and sanctification or holiness. Peace with all men and sanctification or holiness. And I'm using those words synonymously and interchangeably. So as I talk about holiness, pursuing sanctification or holiness, you can know that these two words, they're describing the same thing. Two different words for the same concept.

Notice also that one of these is oriented toward my fellow man: pursue peace with all men. And one of them is oriented toward God: I am to pursue holiness, without which no one will see God. So I have a manward focus, something I am to pursue in terms of my relationship with others, and something I am to pursue in terms of my relationship with the Lord. And these two things are not at odds with one another; they actually go together, as you're going to see.

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Notice the command to pursue. That's the first word of the verse, verse 14: "Pursue peace with all men, and the sanctification without which no one will see the Lord." The word translated "pursue" there is a word, *diōkō*. It means to run after, to chase, to pursue, to strive after. It's sometimes translated "press forward." It means to put to flight or to hunt something. The word is used forty-five times in the New Testament, and interestingly, the bulk of its usage, it is translated as "persecute" and not as "pursue." Persecute. You could translate it "persecute peace with all men." And when I say *persecute*, I mean the exact kind of persecution that you envision when I say the word *persecute*. To chase after something and try and lay hold of it, to seize it. It is used by Paul, in fact, to describe his own act of persecuting the church. Acts 22:4: "I persecuted this Way to the death, binding and putting both men and women into prisons." Paul says in Romans 12:14, "Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse." Same word. Second Timothy 3:12: "Indeed, all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted." It's the same word—pursued, chase, put to flight. It's used by Jesus in Matthew 5:44: "I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you [who pursue you and chase you]."

Now, the author, when he says persecute peace, he doesn't mean look for peace, and when you find it, go and attack it and kill it. That's the opposite of actually what he means. He's not describing what we're to do to peace in terms of putting it to death or ending it, but he is describing the focus and determination and intentionality with which we are to "pursue peace with all men, and the sanctification without which no one will see the Lord" (Heb. 12:14).

It is sometimes translated as "press on." For instance, this word is used three times in the book of Philippians. Philippians 3:12: "Not that I have already obtained it or have already become perfect, but I press on so that I may lay hold of that for which also I was laid hold of by Christ Jesus." Philippians 3:14: "I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus." The third time it's used in Philippians, it's actually translated "persecutor." "As to zeal, a persecutor of the church" (Phil. 3:6). So Paul uses—interestingly, in Philippians he uses this word *pursue* three times, once to describe persecuting Christians and twice to describe pursuing something else. So he says, "There was a time when I pursued Christians to lay hold of them and to seize them and now I am pursuing Christ and His righteousness and His prize." See, Paul went from pursuing one thing to pursuing something else.

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It's also translated, as it is here, as "pursuit" or "to pursue." First Corinthians 14:1—I'll just give you a couple other examples of its usage—"pursue love." And 1 Timothy 6:11: "and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, perseverance and gentleness." This word describes our chase like a hunter chases its prey. It describes us hunting something, going after something, running it down, pursuing it. You are to chase holiness and peace like a persecutor chases after someone. If you want some idea of what this looks like, then think in terms of the persecutors of the church. Think in terms of Saul of Tarsus himself, before he was the apostle Paul. He describes his own persecution of Christians. So how did Paul go about that as a persecutor? What characterized him? Well, Paul went and he got letters from the chief priest to persecute Christians. He went from city to city and from house to house persecuting them. He was zealous in his pursuit, consumed with passion. He had a plan and a purpose and a goal. He was intentional about it. When Paul wasn't going house to house, he was thinking about going house to house. He was anything but unintentional and approached it in any way except for just an occasional or sort of come-as-you-may approach to persecution. He was very passionate about it. You would never hear Saul of Tarsus say something like, "I blocked out next Tuesday to persecute some Christians. Not this Tuesday, but Tuesday the next, not this coming Tuesday, but a week—I've got a lot of things going on. I have a lot of people in my life. The grand—well, it wouldn't be grandchildren—but my friends want me to come over. I have a lot of dinner appointments. But I do have some time in my schedule in a couple of weeks, time to go and persecute Christians." You'd never hear him say that.

And it was anything but accidental or unintentional, his persecution of Christians. You'd never hear Saul of Tarsus say, "I went down to the marketplace to buy some shawarma ingredients and kind of got caught up in the crowd, and one thing led to another, and next thing I know, I'm sitting there holding a bunch of coats while they stoned Steven. I just kind of got myself caught up into the emotion of the moment." No. He was passionate, intentional, deliberate, and principled in his pursuit of Christians. That is how you and I are to be in our pursuit of "peace with all men, and the sanctification without which no one will see the Lord" (Heb. 12:14).

Pursuing in this sense is something that occupies your vision, your focus, your affections, your heart, your desires, your goals, your plans, your thinking. All of it is geared toward executing that pursuit. Like a hunter chases its prey, like a persecutor chases his victims. Almost like a runner running his race for the prize. And we come full circle back to the beginning of chapter 12: "run with endurance the race that is set

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before us” (v. 1). What does that look like? It looks like the pursuit of holiness. And this verb is in the present tense, which means it describes an ongoing present pursuit of peace and sanctification. It's not something that is occasional. It's not something that we stumble into. It's not something that we find time for if we're not doing anything else. It is something that must occupy our attention in an ongoing and deliberate sense.

Pursue. What are we to pursue? Peace with all men and holiness. Let's look first at peace. Now this seems like a bit of an odd command in the context, doesn't it? Now think about this. The author has talked about those who have persecuted them back in chapter 10, he gives the list of heroes of the faith in chapter 11, gets into chapter 12, talks about running a race and then the discipline that God brings into your life. And in the midst of all of his teaching on discipline, which you're well familiar with by now—you've been immersed in that for far too long as it is—on the heels of all of that, the author says pursue peace. That's kind of odd. What might you expect him to encourage us to pursue? You might expect him to say you should pursue righteousness. After all, it is the peaceful fruit of righteousness which the Lord is producing in your life. So if God's going to produce that fruit, you should pursue righteousness. Now, he kind of is saying the same thing when he talks about holiness without which no one will see the Lord (v. 14). It's a little bit of a different idea there.

Or we might expect the author to say, “You should pursue intimacy with God in the midst of your discipline, because you're going to feel as if Heaven is closed and you're praying against a glass ceiling and Heaven is not listening, the Lord's ears are not attentive to you. You're going to feel at times like the psalmist who cries out and says, ‘Lord, why will You turn a deaf ear to my cry? Why will You not hear me? Why will You not act? Why will You not do something in the midst of this?’ That's how you're going to feel in the midst of discipline.” So we might expect the author to say, “You should pursue intimacy with the Lord in the midst of discipline.” But he doesn't say that. We might expect him to say that we should pursue humility so that we might learn from discipline. If, after all, the Lord wants us to submit to His loving Fatherly hand in the discipline, then we might expect the author to encourage us to pursue humility so that we might learn everything in the midst of discipline that we should be learning. Or we might expect the author to say, “Look, in the midst of affliction and suffering and pain, some of which is brought on you by an unbelieving and hostile world that is persecuting you, you should pursue safety and security from your persecutors.” But he doesn't say that. Instead, he says, “Peace.” Meaning the cessation of hostility or the absence of conflict and strife. And peace does go with righteousness. Hebrews 12:11—the Lord is

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producing for us the peaceful fruits of righteousness. So if God is producing something peaceful in our lives, namely the fruit of righteousness, then the peace should be something that we express, it should be something that we pursue. Peace should be something that we enjoy. And so how do we do that? We do that by pursuing peace with all men. Pursue peace with all men, and then that way we enjoy the peaceful fruits of righteousness.

This peace that we have begins with a peace with God. We are born at war with God. And this, by the way, is why men are at war with each other. Men are at war with each other because they are at war with God. But once a man is brought to peace with God, and all of the causes of hostility and enmity and strife are put away with and dealt with in the cross and by Christ, then men can be at peace with one another. But you and I are born in a state of hostility and enmity with God, in which we are darkened in our minds and in our hearts. We have sinned against Him and heaped up a helping of His wrath that is unimaginable and unbearable. That is our lot by virtue of all of our sins that we have committed against Him, by sinning against a holy and benevolent and gracious God. So we are at war with Him, but then in salvation, the great burden of our sin, all of the depth and the weight of that, is removed from us by the cross of Christ in His work. And all of the righteousness of God's dear Son is imputed to us on the basis of faith and faith alone, so that our sins are forgiven and taken out of the way, and we are made righteous by God through faith.

So Romans 5:1 says, "Therefore, having been justified [that is, declared righteous] by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." That peace that we have with God is something that is effected for us by virtue of the work that Christ has done on the cross through His death, His burial, and His resurrection. You and I have peace with God when we turn from our sin, repent, and we believe savingly upon Jesus Christ. We are declared righteous, all of our sins are forgiven, and our sin and the weight of it is taken out of the way. First Thessalonians 5:23 says, "Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you entirely; and may your spirit and soul and body be preserved complete, without blame at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ." Hebrews 13:20 likewise refers to God as a God of peace.

So because we have peace with God, we can be at peace with our fellow men. Once again, when the cause of hostility and animosity is removed and the cause of strife is taken out of the way, which is namely sin and all that creates, when that is removed from us, then we can be at peace with one another, both those who are inside and

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outside the church. Because in the death of Christ men are reconciled to God, they are therefore reconciled to one another. So in the church, there is no room at all for ethnic hostility or ethnic division or what the world calls racism—I reject that term; it's ethnic hostility and ethnic animosity. So there's no room for that in the church. There's no room for a grievance culture or resentment or ethnic hostility or division that is based upon superficial characteristics like the color of our skin or our hairstyles or the shape of our eyes or anything else. There's no room at all for that. Why? Because men have been brought together into one body. So then now we are in one body with one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one cup, one communion, one sacrifice, one intercessor, one common home. We are one bride of Christ. And so all of the causes of ethnic hostility have been removed as God reconciles Jew and Gentile, all men, into that one body which is inside Jesus Christ. When we are in Him, there is no more room for ethnic hostility. And those who are within Christianity who perpetuate that ethnic hostility, they deny the gospel, they destroy unity, and they do damage to the body of Christ.

Once sin has been atoned for and the justice of God has been satisfied, then you and I can be at peace with all men. Why is that? Because there are those who are unbelievers who will sin against us, and I can look at that unbeliever who has sinned against me and say, “Either that unbeliever at some point in his life is going to come to saving faith in Christ, in which case all of his sins, including his sins against me, will be paid for and atoned for and taken out of the way and removed, so I can have no hostility against him, or that unbeliever is going to die in his unbelief and is going to perish everlastingly. And the wrath of God is going to be poured out on his head, in which case all of his sins, including his sins against me, will be paid for under eternal wrath.” Either way, the justice of God is going to be satisfied concerning his sins against me. And so if that is the case, then on what basis do I hold a grudge or on what basis do I refuse to be reconciled with somebody who is even an unbeliever?

In the case of those who are believers, the person who sins against me who is a believer, I can say to myself, “That person is a believer, and so that sin that he sinned against me has been taken out of the way. It is paid for on the cross, and because it is paid for on the cross, God's righteousness is satisfied, His wrath is satisfied, concerning that sin against me.” And God Himself will not require any further payment from that person than what He has already paid for in the death of Christ, because that sin now is fully paid for. So on what basis do I refuse to be reconciled to that person who sinned against me? Since God holds no further penalty over that person's head, how can I hold a penalty over that person's head? Is my sense of justice more scrupulous than God's? Am

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I smarter than God? More righteous than God? More holy than God? So how then can I refuse the payment that has already been made? And on that basis, I can be at peace with all men. With whom? All men.

This makes it easy, because I don't have to worry about who qualifies for this. Aren't you glad this is made easy? You look at somebody with whom you're not at peace and you say, "Does this person qualify?" Well, I go to Hebrews 12:14; it says, "all men." And that's not a gender-specific term, that's a humanity-inclusive term. Men and women. So you qualify. You're part of the human race. You qualify as one with whom I am to be at peace. All men. So does that include Christians? Certainly does. Non-Christians? Certainly does. How about those of other ethnicities or nationalities? My neighbors, magistrates, those in authority, employers, employees, parents, extended family, siblings, spouses? I guess all those would qualify, right? That's all men.

Let's break it down, for simplicity's sake, into two groups: unbelievers and believers. Now, in terms of unbelievers, who might the author specifically have in mind in the context of Hebrews 12? Who do you think? I think he has in mind specifically those people who were causing his readers such affliction and such suffering at their hands that he describes back in chapter 10.

32 After being enlightened, you endured a great conflict of sufferings,

33 partly by being made a public spectacle through reproaches and tribulations, and partly by becoming sharers with those who were so treated.

34 For you showed sympathy to the prisoners and accepted joyfully the seizure of your property, knowing that you have for yourselves a better possession and a lasting one. (Heb. 10:32–34 NASB)

So there were people in their lives, unbelievers, who were making their lives miserable because they were Christians, throwing some of them into prison, reproaching them, causing them great conflicts of suffering, tribulations. Some of them were prisoners, some of them had their property seized, and they accepted that joyfully. So these people were suffering at the hands of unbelievers, hostile unbelievers, even in their own neighborhood. So they are to pursue peace with them, which means you and I are to pursue peace with those who are hostile to us on the outside. That would be persecutors. And by doing so we're doing two things. Number one, we're making it difficult for them to remain at war with us. Making it difficult for them to remain at war with us. You kind of want to approach this in such a way that you leave them no excuse.

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It becomes obvious to everybody watching that this person doesn't deserve this hostility. This person's been so nice to you; why would you treat them that way? Make it difficult for the persecutor, the unbeliever, to make your life miserable and to cause you suffering.

And the second thing that you do is you demonstrate the grace of God as a testimony to them that you represent a God of peace who has reconciled you to all men. So the mindset is that the person causing me the suffering, if I remember that that person is God's gift to me in my life and that the suffering that God is allowing and bringing into my life is intended for my good and is ultimately just going to create more and more glory and more and more rewards and this is God's way of doing that and teaching me and sanctifying me and making me closer to Him—if I can remember all of that, then the person who causes my suffering, I won't see him as my enemy. Instead, I'll see him as a tool in the hand of a sovereign God, a loving Father who intends this for my good. And since God intends this for my good, I can be at peace with this person. I don't have to respond with curses and calumnies upon his head. Instead, I can be at peace with him.

Now, what about those, because we do live in a fallen world, what about those who refuse to be at peace with you? And this could be anybody in the category of all men. What about those who refuse to be at peace with you? You do everything you can, but the reality is that there are some people who will not be at peace with you no matter what you do. That's true. What is your responsibility then? Sometimes we feel like the psalmist in Psalm 120. Listen to his lament. He said, “Too long has my soul had its dwelling with those who hate peace. I am for peace, but when I speak, they are for war” (vv. 6–7). Ouch. There's the psalmist saying, “I do everything. All I want is peace.” But there are just some times when you will run into people, you will have people in your lives that will do anything but be at peace with you, no matter what you do. What do you do then?

Remember the apostle Paul? Was he at peace with all men? No, the Sadducees and the high priests and the Pharisees, when he came to Jerusalem, they had him arrested. They beat him on the steps of the temple. They made false accusations about him and his intentions before the commander of the troops that was in Jerusalem, and then the commander of the troops shipped him off to Caesarea. Those people pursued the apostle Paul to Caesarea Maritima, where they brought false accusations against him before Felix, then before Festus and before Agrippa. And that wasn't enough. See, it wasn't enough for them to simply stone him and drag him outside the city and leave him

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for dead or run him out of their own city. They pursued him a day's travel, many days' travel, just to pursue him and get him out. And then when they finally got a hold of him in Caesarea, he appealed to Caesar, went to Rome, and they pursued him to Rome to bring false accusations against him. Did the apostle Paul do anything to warrant that? No, he didn't. He did everything possible for him to be at peace with all men. But there were people who would never be at peace with him no matter what because he believed and practiced and preached and loved the truth, so they wouldn't be at peace with him.

What do you do in such a situation? Romans 12:18: "If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men." There is an amount of seeking peace with all men that depends upon you. That's your bucket. Everything in that bucket is yours. If possible, as much it depends upon you, be at peace with all men, knowing that there will be times when men will not be at peace with you. But still you keep the offer out. You're peaceable, you're peaceful, you're reconcilable, and you attempt reconciliation and peace and show grace and bless those who refuse to be at peace with you. This is the characteristic of a child of God. "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God" (Matt. 5:9).

So what about believers? Now, if there is any environment where you as a believer in Jesus Christ can be at peace with other believers, it's inside the church. If there's any group of people, we should say, on the face of the planet with whom it would be easiest for you to be at peace, it is fellow Christians. Peace is the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22), we serve a God of peace, we have been brought into a kingdom of peace, and the Savior that we serve is the Prince of Peace. Everything about Him and His people is to be characterized by peace. Romans 14: "For the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. For he who in this way serves Christ is acceptable to God and approved by men. So then [Paul says] we pursue the things which make for peace and the building up of one another" (vv. 17–19).

Colossians 3:15: "Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body; and be thankful." That is not describing some peaceful condition, some peace that you feel in your heart when you're wanting to make decisions. Instead, he is saying that the peace of Christ, that peace which God has made with you in terms of your relationship to Him, that cessation of hostilities—not a feeling of tranquility—the cessation of hostilities should characterize the body of Christ because we've all been brought into one body.

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Psalm 29:11: "The Lord will give strength to His people; the Lord will bless His people with peace." Peace is a blessing. Beautifully, peace is a blessing that we can pursue and that we can bring to pass in our own lives and in the lives of others. It's not a blessing that God would choose or not choose to give to us. It is actually a blessing that we should pursue. And when we pursue it and seize it, what a joy and delight it is. Like oil running down the beard, the psalmist says (Ps. 133:2). That may not sound attractive to you, but in ancient cultures it certainly was. It's that delightful and that glorious.

And you see how this can be done in the body and it should be done in the body just when you read through the various commands in Scripture. Everyone in the body of Christ, every believer, should be pursuing peace, as much as depends upon them, with everybody else in the body of Christ. And we do this when we willingly forgive one another, when we strive together for the unity of the Spirit and the bond of peace, when we look out for one another and love one another and overlook petty grievances and offenses, when we seek the good of others, looking out not only for our own interests but also for the interests of others (Phil. 2:4), considering others as more important than ourselves (Phil 2:3) and serving one another. That is how peace is effected.

A case study in the exact opposite would be the Corinthian church. Striving and divided up in their own little schisms and their personality cults, seeking their own self-aggrandizement, wanting their own way and insisting upon their own preferences. They were suing one another and overlooking sin in their body. They blatantly tolerated blasphemous sin in their midst. They lacked love and didn't pursue love.

And sometimes peace within the body of Christ is a difficult thing to strive for. I think it's more difficult in churches or environments where doctrine does not itself unite people around a common core of faith essentials. When you have an amalgamated group of people who just believe almost anything under the sun and they come together in a church, you can't have peace there, you can't have true unity there. But it can be effected in environments where doctrine is clear and the Word of God is preached. And we all gather around that one central truth, the gospel, and the close implications and the essentials of the gospel. Where that is, you can have unity, even if we might disagree on various other things, we can still be at peace with one another.

Paul said to the Ephesian church,

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1 Therefore I, the prisoner of the Lord, implore you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called,

2 with all [and here are the essentials] humility and gentleness, with patience, showing tolerance for one another in love,

3 being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. (Eph. 4:1–3 NASB)

Sometimes it's difficult in churches. I don't think that's difficult here. So this is not intended in any way as a reproof of this body but just simply to acknowledge that there are times when it is difficult to be at peace with every Christian in your life. But as much as it rests with us, this is what we are to pursue passionately. Like a hunter chasing prey, we go after peace. The lack of hostility and strife and contention with everybody around us, everybody in our lives.

There are a number of hindrances to peace, including an aptness to quarrels. Just run through this in your own mind of yourself or people you know. Do you have an aptness for quarrels or a pugnacious spirit? There is a selfishness that infects all of us. Unrealistic expectations, nursing grievances, an unwillingness to overlook offenses, a readiness to provoke and to be provoked, keeping a list of wrongs and injuries that others have done to you. This is exactly how you produce the bitterness that is warned about down in Hebrews 12:15: “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.” There's a bitterness that can well up when you are unwilling to pursue peace with all men. You want to nurse grievances? Are you ready to be provoked? Do you have a pugnacious spirit? You're always looking for a fight? That in itself is something that needs to be repented of. So we have a responsibility to pursue peace in the world.

And I'm not talking about world peace. I have to clarify this. I didn't clarify this earlier, but it just occurred to me. This doesn't mean putting a world peace bumper sticker on your car. I'm not talking about the UN. None of that stuff can be effective. There is never going to be peace in the world amongst worldlings because they do not have the ability or the capacity to know or enjoy peace. World peace is an impossibility until the Prince of Peace rules and reigns the world. Then we will have peace, but not before that. So chasing after world peace among nations, not interested in that in the least. I couldn't care less about it. I don't like to see innocent people killed in war. I'm not pursuing war

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either. Just understand that we're not talking here about peace among nations or among pagans.

So we have a responsibility to pursue peace in the world in terms of with worldlings, unbelievers. We have a responsibility to pursue peace in the church amongst us as believers. But let's make it even more personal. We have a responsibility to pursue peace at home. In our homes. Some will strive for peace and tranquility in their work, with their bowling league, in their HOA, in their business, in their softball rec league, amongst their neighbors, their fishing buddies, their hunting buddies. They will pursue peace in all of those environments, avoiding conflict, seeking to be at peace with all of those people. But then at home, they are the most unforgiving, pugnacious, grievance-nursing pettifoggers that you would ever not want to meet.

Friends, this ought not to be. If there is any place in the world where we have it within our ability to enjoy true peace, it is at home. Why would we nurse strife in the place where we should most be enjoying the blessing of peace? Why would we be so kind and compassionate and caring and forgiving and gentle and understanding to people who are the furthest away from us, with people that we spend the least amount of time with and care the least for, and then be at war with the person with whom we share a bed? Or a house or a home? Why would we do that? How can you possibly be happy if you are at peace with acquaintances but at war with your own flesh? The person with whom you are one flesh? What good does it do you to be exempt from fighting battles on foreign battlefields a million miles away if the cannons are smoking in your own living room and the casualties and the collateral damage is spread throughout your entire house? That make sense? If there is any place on the planet where the rich, gracious blessing of peace can be enjoyed, it is in our very homes.

Pursue peace with all men in the church, in the world, and in the home. Do not rest until you have humbled yourself and repented of your sin and sought peace. Give no rest to your eyes until you have asked for forgiveness, confessed your sin, and as much as lies with you, do everything you can to enjoy peace with all men, going above and beyond, bending over backwards. It is a precious possession. So chase it, pursue it, put it to flight. Persecute peace in your own home. Don't persecute your spouse; persecute peace in your own home. Sit down with the person that is in your house and say, "I want to enjoy the blessing of peace in the midst of this." How do we do that? Together. Striving together for this, pursuing this together. Go after it like you are hunting prey,

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chase after it like you are a persecutor, and do not let up until you have seized the prize.
Psalm 34:14: “Depart from evil and do good; seek peace and pursue it.”

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