

Hebrews 12:12-17

Therefore.

This keyword in verse 12 indicates a logical connection between this passage and the previous one. In the previous passage, our lives are described as a race - where we, Christians - are the runners. This does not mean we are to compete with one another for a limited place in heaven, rather it highlights the similarity between a runner's mindset and the Christian mindset - to win the final prize. As Christians, our final prize is to become the sons of God and we must train ourselves to be competent in attaining this Christian goal (1 Cor 9:25-27).

Training and disciplining our body is not fun - it's painful. The reward does not come immediately. It goes against our instinct of immediate gratification - the instinct that appears in so many areas of our lives: from our dietary choices, to procrastination, to overspending. However, we should realise that our choices today will have a lasting impact on our future. If we cannot discipline ourselves and give in to the naive desires of immediate gratification, we won't be making the right choices. As Christians, this teaching is important to our faith especially because our path towards the finish line will be a path of suffering.

But what awaits at the finish line?

At the finish line there will be a perfect and eternal joy. Life in a sinless world with the God who loves you so much to the point that he died for you. It means that you belong to Jesus and Jesus belongs to you. So let us hold on to this promise, so that *"the things of this world will grow strangely dim"* and we will be able to endure the hardships that come our way. In Christ, suffering will turn into knowledge, obedience and thanksgiving (James 1:2-4) but for those who are not in Christ, suffering will turn into idolatry, grumbling, and all kinds of sins. So as we run this race, let us look towards those who have gone before us (chapter 11) and to Jesus - who is our forerunner, and the ultimate son of God. United with Christ as sons of God (verse 1-11), we called to **strive for peace and holiness** (verse 12-17).

Peace is essential in Christianity (Psalm 133). The loss of peace is the consequence of sin. The restoration of peace can only come when the effect of sin is reversed - when we are washed in the blood of Christ. We are then given a new life, a new desire, and a new hope. And as Christians we believe in the same God, have the same goal and live the same principles. We must realise how similar we are - the invisible, apostolic, catholic church. We are those who have truly repented and have true faith in Jesus. In fact we use creeds and confessions even today as evidence of the unity between all believers. That is why we should not have petty fights among ourselves. When secondary issues tear the church apart, it is evidence of a more fundamental issue - the forgetting of our identity and purpose in Christ. Peace means striving to *forgive and reconcile* with your brothers and sisters (verse 14, also Mat 5:23-24) but it also means to *not repay evil with evil*. We must show peace towards unbelievers just as Christ, the slain lamb of God endured suffering with silence. The peace that we have is not a false peace (Jeremiah 6:14) but we have it because our suffering brings discipline and our reward is not found in this life (verse 15).

The second part of our calling in this passage is to strive for holiness. This means to live in righteousness and hate sin, to love and prioritise God, and to *belong to* and become *like* God (Lev 11:45). Oftentimes we forget why we should strive for holiness because we forget to focus on our future inheritance. Those who do not want a future inheritance are compared to Esau, a sexually immoral and unholy man (verse 16) who despised his future inheritance for immediate gratification. The Bible makes it clear that he would be condemned because he had despised God's promise.

Our generation is very untrained in the discipline of rejecting immediate gratification for greater, future, blessings. We want everything to be fast and convenient. To slow wifi we say: *"How dare you make me wait another second. You are wasting my time"* or to Netflix we complain: *"How dare you make me wait for another episode. I am losing my patience."* How obvious has impatience seeped into our everyday "Christian life!" Rather it is **patience** that we need. *Patience* to hold on to the gospel. *Patience* to forsake sin. *Patience*

to endure sufferings. Without patience, there is no discipline. And without discipline we cannot strive for holiness.

Nevertheless, being a Christian is not about achieving perfect holiness but about having a true faith in Jesus Christ. And it is this *true faith* that must *compel* us to strive all the more for peace and holiness.