

Mid Week • Hebrews 12:14-29

INTRODUCTION

Because of the great weight of what we find in Chapter 12 of Hebrews, we were only able to cover the first half of the chapter last week.

The last half is as packed as the first and we have some truly marvelous things to examine tonight.

What we find here will challenge each and every one of us.

CHAPTER 12 – B

14 Pursue peace with all *people*, and holiness, without which no one will see the Lord: ¹⁵looking carefully lest anyone fall short of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up cause trouble, and by this many become defiled; ¹⁶lest there *be* any fornicator or profane person like Esau, who for one morsel of food sold his birthright. ¹⁷For you know that afterward, when he wanted to inherit the blessing, he was rejected, for he found no place for repentance, though he sought it diligently with tears.

That, my friends, is a mouthful – not because it’s difficult to read or say, but because of all that the author says.

I see several potential great sermons just in these first 4 verses.

First of all, he writes . . .

14 Pursue peace with all *people*,

The word “pursue” means to chase after something.

It’s a hunting word and speaks of the skill and intensity of a hunter who’s intent on stalking and then securing his prey.

But the goal here, the thing we’re told to pursue is “peace.”

The word speaks of *harmony* and *concord*.

The Greek word *peace* refers to *security* and *safety* and describes relationships between people that are marked by far more than merely a cessation of hostility – it speaks of mutual goodwill that is expressed in harmony and care for one another.

In the NT, *peace* is one of the results of *salvation*.

If you ask most people what they think of when they hear the word “Salvation” they will probably respond with something rather religious sounding.

They will mention the cross or Jesus.

They might mention heaven and hell.

Some will speak of sin and forgiveness.

If we’re to appreciate all that Jesus did for us, we need to understand what the word “salvation” meant to the average Greek speaking person of the time of Christ and what it meant to the Jews prior to the first century – for that is the context from which the NT draws its use of the word.

To put it in a nutshell – salvation meant being rescued from any state of danger and deliverance into a place of *security* and *wholeness*. So, when someone was kidnapped, their rescue and being returned to their family was called “salvation.”

When a sick person was healed and restored to health – they were saved.

When a bankrupt person was thrown into prison for failure to pay their bills, and a wealthy benefactor paid their debts and delivered them from prison, they were saved.

When a nation was defeated by their enemy and the people were sold into slavery and the slaves were then set free by another nation that conquered their conquerors, they were saved!

Until the NT, *salvation* wasn’t primarily as *religious* word – it was mostly secular in its use and simply meant to be *liberated* from danger, any danger, and brought into a place of secure wholeness and *peace*.

Peace is part of the legacy Jesus secured for us as our Savior.

The salvation He brings includes peace.

First – we’ve been liberated from the danger of hell into the place of peace with God.

Second, we’ve been set free from a fallen lifestyle of selfishness that would put us at odds with one another.

Now- we’re called to *express* that salvation by *chasing after peace* with one another.

Pursue peace with all people,

Who are we to pursue peace with? All people! Literally in the Greek it's just **“ALL!”**

If there's trouble with others, it must not be because *we* started or contributed to it.

Romans 14:19 says –

Therefore let us pursue the things which make for peace and the things by which one may edify another.

Some things make for peace – others break peace.

What are some of the things that *break* peace?

- Gossip
- Criticism
- Hostility
- Envy & Jealousy
- Harsh Looks or body language
- Rude or hostile gestures
- Harsh or sarcastic tones of voice

What are some of the things that *make for* peace?

- One of the things I think of is that we must not be thin-skinned.
- Humility as opposed to pride – don't think everything is about you, or that everyone is always pointing things at you.
- Cultivate a mindset that refuses to be offended - 1 Corinthians 13:7

Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

Now – there's an important caveat or carefully considered exception to all this.

Notice that it says we are to “pursue peace with all” it doesn't say we are to be at peace with all people.

The fact of the matter is – there are some people with whom we *cannot* be at peace, with whom our lives cannot be in harmony because theirs is so clamorous and disharmonious.

This is why in Romans 12:18 we read . . .

If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men.

There will be some who make themselves are enemies and who set

themselves against us no matter what we do.
We are not to be at peace with these because we would have to compromise clear-cut issues of righteousness.
Our posture is to be of *holy accommodation* to them – but we must never cross the line of *holiness* in our accommodation.

I have noticed that there are those live in the mode of stirring up strife in the people around them.

They feel *empowered* when they can move others to trouble and upset by wicked counsel that appears as wise counsel.

Arsons are usually people who feel weak and powerless.

They light fires because it gives them the aura and feeling of *power*.

To see such destruction and the frantic efforts of so many to fight the fire makes them feel important.

It's a sick and perverted way to get attention

Trouble-makers do the same thing.

They stir up strife around them as a way to control others.

They will start a whisper campaign or demand that the people around them choose up sides.

They make mountains out of molehills and work tirelessly to find fault with others so they can play on their weaknesses.

Listen to what God says about all this - Proverbs 6:16-19

16 These six *things* the LORD hates, Yes, seven are an abomination to Him:

17 A proud look, A lying tongue, Hands that shed innocent blood,

18 A heart that devises wicked plans, Feet that are swift in running to evil,

19 A false witness *who* speaks lies, And one who sows discord among brethren.

Each of these things, in one way or another is a fundamental violation of the command in Hebrews 12:14 to pursue peace with all.

Peace is a fundamental part of the legacy of God's people – it's one of

the primary things Jesus died to secure for us.

It must rank as one of the chief treasures we both enjoy and guard.

The writers goes on -

and holiness, without which no one will see the Lord:

The “pursue” that begins the verse is understood here – we must pursue holiness.

The word “holiness” is a special form of the common NT word for *holy*.

The word speaks of a *process* that leads to a *result*.

The process is *sanctification* and the result is *purity*.

What the writer means is that just as we chase after *peace* in our relationships with *one another*, we must chase after *purity* in our relationship with *ourselves*.

Purity is not a word much valued today is it?

Fortunately, it’s made a bit of a comeback in the last few years as many teens and young adults have decided to react against the gross sexual immorality that’s come to mark our age.

But all in all, *purity* is a word marked by a lot of negative connotations.

Who wants to be known as “pure” today?

This isn’t a trait or virtue found on many of your fashion magazine lists of top ten things.

When most people hear the word “purity” they think of such synonyms as

- Innocent
- Naïve
- Inexperienced
- Simple
- Unsophisticated
- Novice
- Neophyte
- Narrow & limited
- Missing out on much of the really fun stuff in life

Before Adam and Eve fell, they were pure.

Now, please, don't picture Adam and Eve as hunched over Neanderthals.

That image has been bequeathed to us by a bankrupt and long unproven theory of human origins that finds no basis in history, fact, or scientific research.

Adam and Eve were the *progenitors*, the first of the human race and you can be assured that as the only human beings, besides Christ, to be without sin, and before ANY of the effects of sin had marred the creation, they were something august and majestic to behold.

They were pure, innocent, naïve, inexperienced, and simple – and if we sat down and tried to carry on a conversation with them we would probably be blown away by the depth of their wisdom and use of their God given faculties.

But when they ate of the forbidden fruit – all of that changed.

We don't call it *The Fall* for nothing!

Remember what God called the tree – the Tree of the KNOWLEDGE of Good and Evil.

When they ate, they gained knowledge alright!

They lost their innocence and replaced it with guilt.

They lost their naïveté and gained sophistication.

They moved from inexperience to experience.

And went from being simple to confused and complicated.

And they both would have given anything to go back!

You see, there are some things it would be better we didn't know.

Not all knowledge is good, just because it's knowable.

Some knowledge can become a weapon that can do inestimable damage.

Like the knowledge of how to split an atom.

Knowledge does not equal wisdom, as history so amply teaches us.

The point of all this is that as the people of God, we must not allow the world's disdain for purity to alter our determination to pursue it.

I don't care to be sophisticated if sophistication means I have to be aware of every perversion and debauchery that's out there.

I don't need to know the various names of cigars or how chewing

tobacco is made.

I don't need to know the difference between scotch and bourbon.

I don't really want to know how to grade caviar or the difference between a shot glass and a shooter.

I want to remain as naïve and inexperienced as possible about the various kinds of pornography.

And I *want* to be known as narrow when it comes to my ideas about morality and right and wrong – because I want others to know precisely where I stand – that I stand on what God says. My life is only as wide as this book!

Does my pursuit of purity mean that I'm missing out on much of the fun in life? No way!

The life of faith is a *far greater adventure* than a life lived solely in and for the flesh.

I *will* certainly miss out on some of the *carnal pleasures* that the impure enjoy, *for a season*, but I will also miss out on the *pain, death, and sorrow* their sins inevitably inherit!

How sweet do you think that forbidden fruit tasted to Eve right after she swallowed?

Sweet in the mouth – sour in the belly!

That's sin! That's impurity.

You and I must pursue holiness! Why? Because without a pursuit of purity, no one will see God!

The writer is telling us that being born again issues in a new life and new orientation toward living that *will* result in a *pursuit of holiness*.

If there's no pursuit of holiness, there's no new life!

Don't fool yourself friend – if there is no process toward purity, there is no real spiritual life!

If your own sin doesn't bother you deeply, and if you don't hunger for holiness, understand that something is fundamentally deficient and lacking in your spiritual life.

This is a water-shed issue for us.

Why? Because without the pursuit of holiness, no one will see God.

In Matthew 5:8 Jesus said -

Blessed are the pure in heart, For they shall see God.

Two things we're exhorted to pursue, to chase after here – peace and purity.

Do we pursue peace and holiness by sitting back and taking a nap?

Is this an active or a passive thing we're called to here?

There's an ad on the radio for a diet concoction that sounds very interesting.

You stop eating 3 hours before bedtime and then take a tablespoon right before you go to bed.

It's supposed to burn fat away while you sleep! Wow – how killer! *Forget* dieting and workouts – now you can *sleep* your way to a new slim, trim you!

We love things to be easy and effortless!

Speaking of which – now they have an easy way to get that totally ripped, rock-hard look.

Once you've slept off the surface fat, you can tone and shape your muscles by *electronic stimulation*.

You put on these little pads with wires coming out of them to a little box.

Plug it in and they fire electrical jolts into the muscles, causing them to contract.

So now you can drink your fat-stripper and plug-in your muscle machine and you're all set!

In our age of ease when we have high tech appliances that do almost all the labor of living for us we want to find some way to *automate* our spiritual growth as well.

I wonder if we'll start seeing Bible memorization pills at the Christian bookstore or on the Internet.

Maybe we'll soon see CD's you can play while you sleep that implant *virtues* like patience and gentleness.

Friends – we can't sit back and be passive about spiritual growth – it won't come that way.

The Word tells us to PURSUE! To *chase* after peace with others and holiness toward God.

And know this – anyone who sets him or herself to pursue holiness in the midst of this corrupt world, is going to experience opposition.

The world will not assist you in your pursuit of purity – on the contrary, it is going to resist you at every turn.

You see, the world is threatened by genuine holiness because it

reveals the cheapness and shallowness of the world's carnal delights.

A well-known professional golfer was playing in a Celebrity-Pro tournament with President Gerald Ford, Jack Nicklaus, and Billy Graham.

After the round was over, one of the other pros on the tour asked, "Hey, what was it like playing with the President and Billy Graham?"

The pro said with disgust, "I don't need Billy Graham stuffing religion down my throat!"

With that he headed for the practice tee.

His friend followed, and after the golfer had pounded out his fury on a bucket of golf balls, he asked, "Was Billy a little rough on you out there?"

The pro sighed and said with embarrassment, "No, he didn't even *mention* religion."

Billy Graham had said nothing about God, yet this stomped away after the game accusing him of trying to ram religion down his throat.

The problem was, the evangelist had so reflected *holiness* that his presence made the pro feel uncomfortable.

If we're identified with Christ and walk in holiness, unbelievers will be confronted with the reality of the spiritual realm before we even mention religion.

15 looking carefully lest anyone fall short of the grace of God;

The writer reminds them that it's possible for someone to make a *profession* of faith but for their faith to be merely a "said" faith and not real.

Jesus told the parable of the seed and the soils.

Some seed fell on soil that was shallow, and other that was filled with weeds..

The seeds germinated but the plants quickly withered in the sun or were choked out by the strangling vines.

This was a picture of *aborted* spiritual life.

It was a half-hearted and insincere response to the work of the Spirit.

The writer is calling on his readers to look around their fellowship and make sure everyone is making genuine progress in grace – that no one’s Christianity is in name only and lacks the commensurate evidence of grace.

Friends, the best way to know if a person has been touched by God’s grace is to ask if they are gracious!

A graceless life is just that – *without* grace!

Grace, by it’s very nature *changes* me – it *transforms* me.

If I have received grace, then I will bestow it, show it, live it.

The writer now moves to speak of one of the most important ways grace will be manifest in the lives of those touched by it . . .

lest any root of bitterness springing up cause trouble, and by this many become defiled;

Just as in v. 14 with the word “pursue” being understood as applying to both peace and holiness, so “Looking carefully” applies to both grace and bitterness.

We must be on diligent lookout for any root of bitterness.

The author paints a word-picture of a noxious weed whose roots lie dormant underground and then spring up to kill the ornamental flowers and plants.

Right by our front door we have some roses and a ground cover of miniature iceplant.

Last year I noticed that a weed started growing up through the iceplant, so I tried to yank it out.

I thought I had gotten it all – but it came back, more wide-spread and higher!

So I attacked it again, but it would not go away.

So this last time I sprayed it with weed killer.

The iceplant where I sprayed all shriveled and died but the weed is healthier than ever.

I’ve come to realize the only solution is to yank out the iceplant so that I can get to the roots of the weed.

Bitterness is the result of a settled unforgiveness.

When someone offends or hurts us, we have a choice, we can let go and forgive, or we can hold on and treasure that hurt.

Now we know that the Word of God is absolutely clear on this – we MUST forgive.

It's part of the foundational prayer the Lord taught the disciples –
“Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.”

Then, immediately after teaching them this, He went on to elaborate –
“For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses. [Matthew 6:14-15]

Forgiveness is a channel that must remain open on both ends. When we refuse to forgive and treasure up the hurts and offenses committed against us, it turns to bitterness – and bitterness will quickly kill all affection and love.

And it's called “bitterness” for good reason – it sours a person's whole spirit and life.

Unforgiveness toward even one person will poison you and make trouble across the board.

It leads not only to spiritual problems but physical problems as well.

Look at what it says –

[Looking carefully] lest any root of bitterness springing up cause trouble, and by this many become defiled;

Bitterness is a sinister and noxious spiritual weed and will grow up to produce a harvest of seeds that may very well ruin many lives.

Just as we delight in God's ready forgiveness of us – we must *quickly* let go of the hurts done to us.

We must keep a very short list!

¹⁶[Again we add - *Looking carefully*] lest there be any fornicator or profane person like Esau, who for one morsel of food sold his birthright. ¹⁷For you know that afterward, when he wanted to inherit the blessing, he was rejected, for he found no place for repentance, though he sought it diligently with tears.

The writer has told us to be on the lookout for those who've fallen short of God's saving grace, for any root of bitterness, and now for those among us who are just plain lost and living a lifestyle that is a moral embarrassment!

Are there people in the church today, who call themselves Christians, who are practicing sin that is clearly outside the pale of acceptable morality?

Of course!

Here the writer speaks specifically to those who are involved in sex outside of marriage and other lifestyle issues that lie outside the realm of godliness.

That word “profane” comes from the Greek word meaning “outside the temple” and refers to any and everything that’s ungodly in orientation.

The writer gives us a quick character sketch of a profane person in the example of Esau.

Here was a guy, the firstborn son of Isaac, who was willing to cash in his spiritual inheritance for a bowl of lentil stew!

God had made the greatest promise of all history to Abraham – we find it in Genesis 12.

He promised Abraham the land of Israel

He promised to make Abraham descendants into a mighty nation who would occupy that land.

And then He promised to bring the long sought for Redeemer *through* those descendants.

This 3-fold promise is the foundation and the basis of all of the rest of human history.

Isaac was the son of Abraham through whom that promise was to be realized.

Isaac’s wife Rebekah had twins – the first born named Esau, the second was came out hard on his heels was Jacob.

As the firstborn, the Abrahamic Covenant belonged to Esau – all the promises God made to Abraham passed to Isaac and then to him – but he cared nothing for them!

One day, returning from hunting and famished, he came into the camp and approached his brother Jacob who envied his brother’s position as the firstborn.

Jacob was making a pot of stew and Esau demanded a bowl – but Jacob refused.

Esau pleaded and Jacob suggested he turn over the birthright in exchange.

Esau agreed!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

Let's say you're the son or daughter of a famed archaeologist who did extensive work at Qumran in Israel and with the Dead Sea Scrolls discovered there.

When your father died he left you his collection of artifacts gathered from years of research.

One of them is a 4 foot high ceramic pot stuffed full of ancient scrolls.

You remember your father saying something about them being from the Dead Sea Scroll collection.

You decide to have a garage sale one day and someone sees the pot and offers you \$50 for it.

You look at the pot – consider how much pizza \$50 could buy and say, “Deal!”

Not only have you just done something really foolish, you've also shown your disdain for the work of your father and the vast worth of his work.

Your whole sense of priorities and value are completely out of whack.

This is what Esau did – he showed his utter disdain for the spiritual treasure which was his inheritance and his father's and grandfather's legacy.

He placed more value in a bowl of macaroni and cheese than in the spiritual reality of the covenant that undergirds all of history.

A bird in the hand is *not* worth two in the bush if the bush belongs to you!

Now, here's the rub – when Esau came to realize that he'd traded in his inheritance for a bowl of stew and that the blessing that ought to have been his had been given to his brother, he broke down and wept.

But they weren't sincere tears of *repentance* – he was only sorry for what he had lost, not for the shallowness of his own soul that had led to his loss.

The writer is telling his readers to not be fooled by the insincere tears of the profane.

There are those in the Church who like Esau, are numbered with the family of God, but who in fact are lost.

Though they call themselves Christians, they live lives centered on

the flesh.

They are ungodly and immoral – and when their sin finds them out, as it inevitably will, they weep and cry and lament the trouble their sin has caused them.

They make a good show of repentance – but as soon as the trouble lifts, they're right back to their sin.

The writer is saying that we need to confront such people and tell them they are playing the part of Esau.

Tears are not enough – there must be change!

The spirit must take priority over the carnal.

Our inheritance in Christ must be more important than a bowl of macaroni and cheese, or a pair of Calvin Klein's, or a faster more powerful computer, or whatever our insatiable flesh demands.

Now we come to a new section.

After the several exhortations of the first 17 verses of chapter 12, we have a passage which aims at reminding us of what *our* spiritual inheritance is.

The writer paints another picture, this time of the nation of Israel after the Exodus, gathered at the base of Mount Sinai – where God came down and manifest His glory and majesty before them . . .

18For you have not come to the mountain that may be touched and that burned with fire, and to blackness and darkness and tempest, ¹⁹and the sound of a trumpet and the voice of words, so that those who heard *it* begged that the word should not be spoken to them anymore. ²⁰(For they could not endure what was commanded: "*And if so much as a beast touches the mountain, it shall be stoned or shot with an arrow.*")
²¹And so terrifying was the sight *that* Moses said, "*I am exceedingly afraid and trembling.*")

22But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, to an innumerable company of angels, ²³to the general assembly and church of the firstborn *who are* registered in heaven, to God the Judge of all, to the spirits of just men made

perfect, ²⁴to Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling that speaks better things than *that of Abel*.

We have two mountains here: Mt. Sinai and Mt. Zion.

It was at Sinai that God gave the law and it was on Zion that the City of Jerusalem was built.

Throughout both the Old and New Testaments, Mt. Zion is a symbol for Heaven.

The earthly City of Jerusalem, which was built on top of Mt. Zion, represents the dwelling place of God and His people.

The writer is drawing a stark contrast here between Judaism and Christianity.

You see, though the people spent an entire year at Mt. Sinai – they didn't really live there – that wasn't the place God had ordained for them to settle down.

They were merely camping out – until the law had been given and set up in their national life.

Their real destination was the Promised Land, with its capital at Jerusalem.

The law was given in the desert, while they were enroute – but the destination was a *permanent settlement* in the place of Promise.

The writer is saying that by virtue of their faith in Christ, his reader have come home.

The Judaism of their past was *temporary*, but now they've arrived at the destination and purpose of the law, to guide them to Christ.

Therefore, they ought not retreat to the desert of the law.

Now he warns them . . .

²⁵See that you do not refuse Him who speaks. For if they

Meaning the Jews of the Exodus who heard God speaking from Mt. Sinai -

For if they did not escape who refused Him who spoke on earth, much more *shall we not escape* if we turn away from Him who *speaks* from heaven, ²⁶whose voice then [at Mt. Sinai] shook the earth; but now He has promised, saying, "*Yet once more I shake not only the earth, but*

***also heaven.”* ²⁷Now this, “*Yet once more,*” indicates the removal of those things that are being shaken, as of things that are made, that the things which cannot be shaken may remain.**

If God was serious in the establishing of the law, which was only temporary and meant to lead people to the fulfillment found in Christ, *then how much more* serious is God when He calls people to repentance and faith in His Son?

The writer is making a classic *a fortiori* argument here – from the lesser to the great.

If a lesser thing is true and bears consequences, then how much more true is this greater thing and its consequences?

The writer is straightforward in telling them that a *dramatic change* has now come in God’s plan of Redemption.

The Mosaic Law, with its emphasis on the temple, the priesthood and the sacrifices, is passing away.

Christ has fulfilled it – and now what’s required is faith in Him.

In v. 26 he quotes Haggai 2:6, which speaks of the very end when all of creation is shaken and disintegrates - leaving only that which is secure in Christ left standing.

But it’s the first part of v. 25 that the author makes his strongest point!

The words are dramatic and emphasized.

If we could use modern technology and computer graphics to portray what he’s saying we would put the words, “**See that you do not refuse Him who speaks**” in 72 point, boldface, italics and underline, in bright red and followed by a hundred exclamation points.

This is his real point – God has spoken; we must heed Him!

In fact, the book began with this - Hebrews 1:1-2

¹God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, ²has in these last days spoken to us by His Son.

God has spoken. He’s spoken in and through His Son Jesus Christ who IS God!

We must be ultra careful that we do not refuse Him but that we *heed and respond* to what He says.

When Elizabeth Barrett became the wife of Robert Browning, her parents disowned her because they disapproved of the marriage. Elizabeth, however, wrote almost every week, telling them that she loved them and longed for a reconciliation.

After 10 years she received a huge box in the mail containing all the notes she had sent.

Not one had been opened!

Although these "love letters" have become an invaluable part of classical English literature, it's really pathetic to think that they were never read by Elizabeth Barrett Browning's parents.

Had they looked at just one, the broken relationship with their daughter might have been healed.

All of us are alienated from God because of sin but He has provided a way of reconciliation.

The Bible is His love letter telling us all about it.

See that you do not refuse Him who speaks.

28Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us have grace, by which we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear.

29For our God *is* a consuming fire.

Verse 29 drives us back to vs. 18-21; let's read them again . . .

18For you have not come to the mountain that may be touched and that burned with fire, and to blackness and darkness and tempest, **19**and the sound of a trumpet and the voice of words, so that those who heard *it* begged that the word should not be spoken to them anymore. **20**(For they could not endure what was commanded: "*And if so much as a beast touches the mountain, it shall be stoned or shot with an arrow.*")

21And so terrifying was the sight *that* Moses said, "*I am exceedingly afraid and trembling.*")

One of the most notable manifestations of the presence of God on the top of Mt. Sinai was fire and lightening.

In the book of Exodus we read that Moses told the people to get ready for the appearance of God by washing their clothes,

consecrating themselves and putting away any questionable thing.

Then, on the 3rd day of consecration, God descended in glory and majesty on the top of the Mt.

There was thundering and lightening, the ground shook and the clouds roiled and boiled.

A fierce fire like a furnace chewed at the stones on the top of the Mt. and a loud trumpet blast pierced the air, causing all the people to tremble in terror.

In v. 29, the writer wants to remind his readers that although God's Plan of Redemption has now changed - God HIMSELF has not changed!

The ritual aspects of the Law of Moses have been fulfilled in Christ – but this doesn't mean that God is any less holy or that His demands have abated.

God is still Holy, and the fire that consumed the top of the Mount still consumes today.

During the 2nd Century, a heretic named Marcion came to power in Asia Minor who did much damage – in fact, he split the Church in two.

Though he was excommunicated early on, his heresy lasted for 2 centuries and occupied much of the attention of the church fathers as they fought for orthodoxy.

In essence, Marcion taught that the God of the OT and the God of the NT were two separate and distinct Gods.

He said the God of the OT was a mean-spirited and angry deity while the God of the NT was a gracious loving God.

He taught that Christians ought to have nothing to do with the OT and produced his own version of the Bible that contained only an edited version of the Gospel of Luke and some of Paul's epistles, also highly edited.

Marcionism died out by the end of the 4th Century, but experienced a revival in the 19th when *Liberalism* born.

The Holiness of God was submerged under the idea of the *Universal Fatherhood of God* and the *Universal Brotherhood of Man*.

God's love and grace were emphasized at the expense of His righteousness and holiness.

God was turned from a consuming fire into a heat lamp meant to warm cold hands and hearts.

The writer of Hebrews is careful to remind his readers that while God's plan has changed – God Himself remains unchanged.

The Consuming Fire of Mt. Sinai burns on – but now on Mt. Zion, the Mount they've been privileged to come to through faith in Christ.

We must not fear the fire – but rather come all the way in to it that it may consume and burn away all that within us that is unworthy of the presence of God.

Jesus Christ has gone before us to make sure that the fire will not destroy us but rather purify us – and make us holy.

So he says in v. 28 –

28 Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us have grace, by which we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear.

At Mt. Sinai, the people couldn't even touch the mountain.

Boundary markers were set up to mark off the perimeter and to make sure no one violated the holiness of the sacred place.

But now – we're invited to ascend the holy mountain of God's presence through faith in Christ.

We're invited to embrace the grace of God and come into the very presence of the Holy.

CONCLUSION

I hope and pray that as we come here on Sunday mornings for what we call our "*worship service*" we would never forget that our God *is*, not was, IS a consuming fire.

I fear that a bit of *Marcionism* has resurfaced in the modern evangelical church.

As we've been seduced by the world's idea of success and come to redefine it in terms of *numbers* rather than *faithfulness* – we've opened our doors to worldly means and shelved the means of the Holy Spirit.

We've taken our focus off worshipping and serving God and

placed it on appealing to fallen men and women.

Instead of seeking God, we're seeking seekers.

Instead of hymns by Fanny Crosby or Charles Wesley, or even modern worship by Rick Founds or Matt Redman – many churches have embraced the music of Rodgers & Hammerstein and Burt Bacharach.

In a conference we held here recently one of the guest speakers suggested that in order to appeal to kids today we ought to play Brittany Spears & N'Sync!

His suggestions for curriculum were modeled more after Nickleodeon than the Bible.

Our God is a consuming Fire – He Is Holy, Righteous, & True.

Our worship must never become trivial or man-centered.