

FINISH STRONG

Hebrews 3:12-15 *Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God.*

But exhort one another daily, while it is called To day; lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.

For we are made partakers of Christ, if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast unto the end;

While it is said, To day if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts, as in the provocation.

His name was Griffin. All of his friends called him Griff. Griff was the mile runner on his school track team. He liked track. It was his one and only sport. He wanted to be the best he could be, and he took running the mile seriously. He watched what he ate and kept his weight at a minimum. Extra pounds could slow him down. Each day he worked hard to make himself a better runner. Each day he ran the mile with one goal in mind. He wanted to do better than he had done before.

In order to keep his concentration his coach had a fresh runner pace Griff. Each time around the quarter mile track. Griff would run all four laps but each lap a new runner ran along side him for one lap. This helped him keep the same pace and not slow down.

The last lap was the most important. Griff trained hard so when it came to the last lap he would still have a kick. So many times it was that kick that won the race. So many times in matches with other schools at a track meet the race was close until the last half of the last lap. Then Griff would use his kick. He would increase his speed and run all out to the finish line. It was Griff's ability to finish strong that often enabled him to win the race. Griff always finished strong. That is the message the writer of Hebrews emphasized for the Christian life. Christians need to dedicate their lives to Christ, live for the Lord and finish strong for Jesus.

TO HAVE VICTORY IN THE CHRISTIAN LIFE TAKES CONSTANT VIGILANCE.

Heb. 3:12 *Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God.*

If you read the first part of this chapter you will find two very important exhortations. First: keep your eyes on Jesus. Heb. 3:1 says, ***WHEREFORE, holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling, consider the Apostle and High Priest of our profession, Christ Jesus;***

We are always to follow the faithfulness of Jesus. We are to live for Jesus. Not just live as the Bible instructs us to. We are not to follow Jesus only because it is right. We are to live for Jesus. Live as He wants us to and obey Him because we love Him. We are to live in the Spirit. The writer tells us Jesus is greater than Moses. Jesus is Our High Priest. Jesus is not just a prophet. He is the Son of God. The second person of the Godhead and He is the Saviour of the world.

Second: we must be careful to follow Jesus to the end. Heb. 3:6 says, ***But Christ as a son over his own house; whose house are we, if we hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm unto the end.*** We are to prove every day we are the disciples of Jesus. We are to be careful to keep our ***confidence***. That is our faith. We are to keep the faith, brothers and sisters. We are to live a holy life; we are to have a solid faith and live for Christ every day. We are to be careful to keep our ***rejoicing***. That is our joy in the Lord. We don't think of that sometimes do we? But that is one of the proofs we are saved. We have something other people do not have. That is if we are truly saved and born again. That is one of the big differences between people who only profess to be saved and those who truly are God's children. God's children have the joy of the Holy Spirit. They don't serve the Lord like they are obeying a set of rules. They serve the Lord with joy. Notice we are to keep our ***rejoicing!*** That is a joy that bubbles over. It is a joy that people can sense and see. It is the ***rejoicing*** of people who find their happiness in Jesus.

Once we are saved we must be careful not to let Satan steal our victory. Oh! I see so many Christians who do not have victory. They have let the world creep into their lives and they are trying to please two masters. They have lost their victory. The writer of Hebrew says, ***Take heed***, you see, the world is a dangerous place. It is full of temptations and snares for God's people. The devil wants to steal your victory. He wants to make you sad and get you to sin. In the book of Numbers chapter 25 the devil set a trap for the children of Israel. The Moabites invited Israel to supper. It was a feast to their gods. The Israelites foolishly accepted the invitation. They went and they had fun. Now there is nothing wrong with having good clean fun. That is good. But when fun is not good and clean that is not O. K. The Israelites started doing things they knew did not please God. They did some immoral things. See that's the way the devil works. He wants you to go places you shouldn't because it is fun. He wants you to do things that you know are wrong, because it is fun. Pretty soon you have yourself convinced its O.K. There is really nothing wrong with it. After all, other people do it. Then you get upset when someone dares to say that is sin. Well, that's what happened to the Israelites. Sin always has its price. God sent a plague and 24000 people died because of the plague. Israel had let the devil trick them. Oh they had fun all right. Yes, and they paid for it. It is not fun to pay for your sin.

To keep our victory in Jesus we must ***Take heed***. Heb. 3:12, ***Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, departing from the living God.*** Listen, the standards the church teaches are important. They help keep us from the ways of the world. Christians need to have fun but they need to be careful. Christians need to live like Jesus wants them to. Not like the world. Christians need to dress in a modest, holy manner, and not like the world. Be careful, ***Take heed***, not to do things that lead to sin. The Lord wants us to have victory. Jesus saved us to be happy! Have fun but understand life is not about having fun. Life is about going to Heaven and being with Jesus forever!

TO KEEP THE VICTORY WE MUST HELP OTHERS RECOGNIZE THE DECEITFULNESS OF SIN.

Heb. 3:13, ***But exhort one another daily, while it is called To day; lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.***

Sometimes the Church is just not afraid of sin. People think God is not that strict. They say people who believe the Bible means what it says are just old fashioned. They just haven't grown with the times. Often we don't take sin seriously enough. Now listen, God is a God of Love, but He is a strict God. Most of us do not want the flu. Now, I am not talking about what people sometimes call the flu. I mean the really bad stuff. The flu is bad! When you have the flu you don't just feel bad, you feel like you are going to die. And many people have died from the old fashioned flu. When the medical community announced this year that there was not enough flu vaccine people got upset. They were afraid to catch the flu.

Christians need to be that concerned about sin. To most people today sin is no big thing. Nobody really gets upset if a person lies. They think oh well everybody does it. So what if people live together without being married or commit fornication or even adultery. It's just the way things are today. People just kind of turn their head. It is no big deal. When some one cusses a blue streak or uses God's name in vain people think there is nothing wrong with it. Oh! How far the devil has brought us. Let me tell you the world is a mess, but God's people don't have to lay down in the gutter with them. The church had better wake up. Christians had better wake up. People are afraid of bad colds, they are afraid of pink-eye, they are afraid of head lice and a lot of other contagious diseases. If we know someone has something we can catch we want to avoid it. Well I do too. I am not dumb. I don't want to be sick. But listen, people need to be afraid of sin. The church needs to avoid sin. Listen, sin is bad, sin destroys families, and lives. Sin is nothing to play with. God hates sin. Job eschewed evil. Christians better understand sin is something to fear.

If Christians keep their victory in the Lord they have to help each other live a holy life. Heb. 3:13 says, ***But exhort one another daily, while it is called To day; lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.*** Does the Bible mean what it says? I believe it does. Victory is so important. Happiness is so important. Peace is so important! But to have victory a person must be close to the Lord. We need to be spiritual people not worldly people. We need to witness and pray and live for Jesus, and have the joy of the Lord. There is urgency in Heb 3:13. It says, ***But exhort one another daily, while it is called Today...*** Exhort means to warn- to give advice strongly or to preach or admonish. Get the idea? We are talking about sin. We are to remind each other and warn each other. We are to hear good Bible Preaching. We need to be exhorted daily about the danger of sin. Some people don't want anyone telling them what is right and wrong. Some people will accuse you of judging them if you point out something is sin. Hear what the Word of God says Christian. Heb. 3:13 says, ... ***lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.*** The Bible tells us to help each other not to be deceived by sin. Our government warns people every day about things that are dangerous. The government puts warnings on every package of cigarettes. The government publishes charts to tell people about food

that is harmful to a person's health. The medical association warns people about things that are dangerous. Is not the church of the Living God supposed to set standards and warn people about things that are dangerous to people's souls?

The world is full of the devil's snares. It is sad when people ignore the preacher, and ignore the church, and ignore the Word of God and fall into sin. It is sad to see Christians lose their victory, to see people who once enjoyed being saved become bitter and defeated. I'm telling you it happens, and I'm telling you if we are not careful it can happen to the best of us. In fact, the devil works harder to catch the best. When you go fishing don't you work harder to catch the big fish? Of course you do. Well, that's why the devil wanted to sift Peter. He didn't get it done, because Jesus prayed for Peter, and Jesus constantly exhorted all the disciples about sin. Listen, the devil wants to catch you. You'd better be careful! You'd better learn to listen and be afraid of falling. When someone tells you something is sin, you should pay attention!

David knew what it was to lose his victory. He cried out *Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation.., (Ps. 51:12)*. I have seen people lose their victory. A few years ago Jimmy Swaggert got himself in a lot of trouble. See, I told you the devil delights in catching the big ones. Here was a famous T. V. evangelist. He was well respected. He could preach. But he let his guard down. He got into sin. Oh! He repented, and I know God forgives people, but Jimmy Swaggert's ministry was ruined forever. How sad. How tragic. But Jimmy Swaggert needed some caring Christian to go to him and say Bro. Swaggert you are heading for trouble. He needed folks to pray for him. He needed to be warned. Folks if we are going to keep the victory we need to be exhorted about the dangers of sin.

TO KEEP THE VICTORY CHRISTIANS MUST FINISH STRONG.

Heb. 3:14, *For we are made partakers of Christ, if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast unto the end:*

Hebrews chapter three is a warning not to let anything or anybody cause us to stop serving the Lord. This chapter is about the children of Israel who came out of Egypt. God delivered them out of slavery with a great miracle. He parted the Red Sea. He was leading them to the promised land. They refused to trust God and wouldn't go fight and win the land. They wandered for 40 years in the wilderness, because they didn't live for the Lord. They didn't get to the promised land. This chapter is a warning to Christians not to lose their faith. Heb. 3:12-19 says, *Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God.*

But exhort one another daily, while it is called To day; lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.

For we are made partakers of Christ, if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast unto the end:

While it is said, To day if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts, as in the provocation

For some, when they had heard, did provoke: howbeit not all that came out of Egypt by Moses.

But with whom was he grieved forty years? was it not with them that had sinned, whose carcasses fell in the wilderness?

And to whom sware he that they should not enter into his rest, but to them that believed not?

So we see that they could not enter in because of unbelief.

Oh! It is so great to have the victory of Jesus! It is so great to know you are saved, and you have a home in Heaven! I have a mansion! I guess one of mans desires is to have a nice home. I have one in Heaven. Jesus is building it. It will be a reflection of my service, sacrifice, dedication and faithfulness and my love for Him. Praise the Lord! It is wonderful to have the joy of salvation.

To know everything is right between you and God. It is so great to grow in the Lord.

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TO KEEP THE VICTORY WE MUST HELP EACH OTHER RECOGNIZE THE DECEITFULNESS OF SIN.

TO KEEP THE VICTORY CHRISTIANS MUST FINISH STRONG.

I knew a preacher some years ago. He was not a famous preacher. He preached at mostly country churches. As far as I know he never pastored what you would call a large church. He was faithful to preach the Bible and a soul winner. But after many years of faithful service to the Lord he developed cancer. Cancer, that awful stuff. He wanted the Lord to heal him. He prayed and asked churches to pray for him. But he didn't lay down on the job. No sir. He just kept on preaching and telling people about Jesus, and trying to get people to go to Heaven. He preached until he was physically too weak. The cancer got in his voice and he couldn't preach any more. Well, preacher, some would say, "I am sure then he laid on his bed and didn't go to church". Well, you are wrong. It was hard, but he kept going to church. He kept praising the Lord, and he kept asking folks to pray the Lord would heal him. Finally that old cancer destroyed his strength, and destroyed his body and the Lord took him home. There would be some who would say, see there, what good did it do him to pray and preach and ask people to pray for him? Oh, how short sighted some people are, how unbelieving some people are. That old preacher knew what a lot of people can't understand. Oh sure, he would like to have been healed, and gone on preaching many more years. But that just wasn't God's will. That preacher was willing to leave even his health, and his life, and even his suffering in God's hands. He had his eyes on the promised land. He was on his way to Heaven. You see, if we will just keep trusting Jesus even death cannot defeat us. In fact death can be our finest hour.

We can look back on a faithful life and people can see we really love our Jesus. When that old preacher stands before the Lord the Lord will say to him. *...Well done thou good and faithful servant: thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy*

lord(Mt. 25:21). I believe the Lord will say you lived faithfully for your Jesus. You held the beginning of your confidence and YOU FINISHED STRONG!

Oh, listen, child of God. Finish Strong! Don't let the Devil tempt you to fall for some *morsel of meat*. You keep your eyes on the finish line. You keep running for Jesus, and you finish strong! Don't let some temptation keep you from doing the Lord's will. Don't let some worldly pleasure or profit cause you to lay your cross down. Don't let the troubles and heartaches of life cause you to take your eyes off of Heaven. Just keep on keeping on. Dedicate your life to the Lord. Oh! Others will turn aside and others will drop out, but don't you ever quit! Keep your eyes on Jesus! Just keep going and when you get close to the finish line give it your best kick for Jesus. Finish strong! Finish strong!