

2 Corinthians 13:11-14 Finally, brothers, good-bye. Aim for perfection, listen to my appeal, be of one mind, live in peace. And the God of love and peace will be with you. ¹² Greet one another with a holy kiss. ¹³ All the saints send their greetings. ¹⁴ May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

Dear Christians Seeking to Live for Jesus,

“Aim high.” I’m not sure if it still is, but that used to be part of the slogan the Air Force used for recruitment. “Aim high”= challenge yourself; don’t just settle for ordinary or average; push yourself to the limits; go beyond expectations!

In his own way, that’s what the apostle Paul is reminding us Christians this Trinity weekend: **“Aim High!”** (1) *Set high goals as you live for Jesus*, and (2) *Go to the Highest to reach those goals.*

1

Paul says, ***“Finally, brothers and sisters, good-bye.”***

These words are part of his final greetings in his 2nd letter to the Corinthian Christians. He loved them as brothers and sisters in Christ. Yet, they were a challenging group. They often were cliquish and divided; they had allowed open sin (immorality) to go unchallenged; and they had often worshiped in disorderly ways causing confusion and offense.

As a pastor, Paul addressed these issues in his two letters to them. Now he encourages them: ***“Aim high!” “Aim for perfection, listen to my appeal.”*** In other words, *“In view of all that Jesus has done for you, listen to his Word and try to match the way you live and speak with what Jesus says in his Word.”* Paul’s encouragement is directed to us, too. Because of our sinful natures, you and I know full well how easy it is to get sloppy or slipshod with our Christian lives.

There’s an old expression: ***“If someone came looking to put Christians in jail, would there be enough evidence to convict you as one?”*** In short, do we represent Jesus clearly to the world? Certainly a great problem in our society today is decadent unbelievers. But an even greater problem is decadent *believers!* If we, the family of Christ, become diluted and polluted by the world, what does that show others about our Lord and Savior? And what does that show Jesus about the sincerity of our love? As Jesus once talked about, how can we be ***“the salt of the earth”*** (a preservative from decay and corruption) if ***“the salt loses its saltiness?”***

Christians, we are called on as God’s redeemed, privileged, and holy people to *“aim high,”* to have high expectations of ourselves. We often have high expectations of *others*, but how about ourselves? When we use our tongues, what comes from them? Praise or cursing? Joy or complaint? When it comes to our stewardship of time, talents, or treasures, do we *“aim high”*? Do we seek to do the most we can for Jesus with the gifts he’s given us, or just get by? Do our decisions show that Jesus and his kingdom are our greatest treasures, or are we glued tightly to the paltry things this world has to offer?

Sloppy Christianity really means we are becoming comfortable with the sin that insidiously slips into our lives.

A circus performer had a large snake, a boa constrictor. For years the man performed with the snake. He would have it coil around his body and neck. At his command, the snake would uncoil and he’d return it to its cage. One night the man did the usual, but the snake refused to release its grip. It choked the man to death.

Sin often works in a similar way. We get lulled into a false sense of security. We get comfortable with certain sins because we think we have everything under control. But it can choke the spiritual life right out of us. You have seen it happen, and so have I. And it can happen to us to. God says, ***“If***

you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall!" (1 Cor. 10:12). Aim high, because aiming low can be spiritually fatal.

Paul continues *"Be of one mind, live in peace. And the God of love and peace will be with you."* Earlier in his letter, Paul had warned the Corinthians about their factions. He tells them to aim higher than that. To the Romans he wrote, *"As far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone"* (Rom. 12:18). Set the bar high. Don't just live at peace with people you like and who agree with you all the time, *"live at peace with everyone!"* -- even those who hate and mistreat you. That, Paul says, is aiming high.

Do we always feel like aiming high? Are we always good at it? Obviously not. So how can we? We're imperfect sinners!

2

Paul answers the question. *"The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all."* How can we aim high? We have the Triune God working on our side! The same God who graciously rescued us from sin that leads to eternal death also strengthens us to aim high with the way we live and speak. We have the **Father** who holds us in his powerful arms, the **Son** who forgives us as we repent of our daily sins, and the **Holy Spirit** who firms up our faith as we hear the Word and receive the Supper of the Savior.

That powerful, loving Triune God is our Leader who helps us, as someone wrote, *"to overcome discouragement, to conquer self-pity, and to direct ourselves toward the goal. As humans we tire easily, we become confused by the issues, and we get hopelessly entangled in our own reasoning. Our vision becomes clouded and blurred. But then our Leader lights a candle and we see again."* Earlier this year I was blessed to have cataracts removed from my eyes by replacing the lenses. I know many of you have too. I was amazed at the clarity of vision after the procedure. Vision-wise, I had been seeing only a fraction of what I can see now. God, in his Word, helps us see clearly. We can see so much more when we go the Lord and see through his lenses.

A person can drive the finest car and have perfect eyesight, but if he tries to find his way around London with a map of Chicago, he's not going to arrive where he set out to go. Our Triune God, in his Word, gives us a map of life so we will end up where he's aiming us. Without that map we are driving blind.

Aim high, fellow believers. We are children of the One who is the Highest and wants you to be with him in the highest and have the highest position of honor. Aim high by living for the One who lived and died for you!

Amen.