
Words of Truth

Hebrews 12:4

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In this article we are going to study a very interesting passage of Scripture. The wording has made this passage a bit difficult for me to understand. I am also struggling to see it clearly in the context we have read, though it certainly applies in what was written following. The word “and” in Hebrews 12:5 ties this verse to the context going forward. Here is the verse we are going to study: *“Ye have not yet resisted unto blood, striving against sin”* (Hebrews 12:4).

We are going to start off breaking down the meaning of some of the words in this passage of Scripture. The word translated “resisted” [ἀντικαθίστημι] is defined as: “to set down (troops) against, i.e. withstand: — resist. To put in place of another; to place in opposition; to dispose troops, set an army in line of battle. To stand against, resist” (Strong’s # 478). A word study is very difficult on this term. This is the only verse in the New Testament wherein we find this Greek word being used.

The word translated “unto” [μέχρι] is defined as: “as far as, i.e. up to a certain point (as a preposition, of extent): — till, (un-)to, until. As far as, until” (Strong’s # 3360). We see this term translated in other passages as “until” (Matthew 11:23, Matthew 13:30, Matthew 28:15, Acts 10:30, Acts 20:7, I Timothy 6:14, and Hebrews 9:10), “till” (Mark 13:30 and Ephesians 4:13), “to” (Romans 5:14), and “unto” (Romans 15:19, Philippians 2:8, Philippians 2:30, II Timothy 2:9, Hebrews 3:6, and Hebrews 3:14).

The term translated “blood” [αἷμα] can mean a variety of things. Yet, it is not hard to understand. It is defined as: “blood, literally (of men or animals), figuratively (the juice of grapes) or specially (the atoning blood of Christ); by implication, bloodshed, also kindred: — blood...” (Strong’s # 129). That Greek term appears about ninety-nine times in the New Testament and is as broadly used as the definition. It can refer to the blood of man (Matthew 23:35), the fruit of the vine figuratively representing Jesus’ blood (Matthew 26:28), disease (Mark 5:25), animal blood (Hebrews 9:12), etc.

The term translated “striving” [ἀνταγωνίζομαι] only appears in this one New Testament verse. The definition of that term is: “To struggle against (figuratively) (“antagonize”): — strive against. To struggle, fight” (Strong’s # 464). We have just previously considered running the race of faith and enduring to the end. We also read about laying aside sin that would easily beset a person. So, the word is pretty easy to understand.

The Greek term translated as “sin” [ἁμαρτία] is just as you would think. It is the common term used in the New Testament for sin that appears one hundred seventy-four times. The definition is: “a sin (properly abstract): — offense, sin(-ful)...” (Strong’s #266). We see that same Greek word used in a verse that clearly defines sin (I John 3:4).

Looking at other translations, that are not as accurate as the KJV, has not been too helpful for me. The ASV 1901 reads the same as the KJV. One translation reads: “You have not yet resisted to bloodshed, striving against sin” (New King James Version). Other translations vary and some greatly from others. So apparently, this passage of Scripture is difficult for translators as well as so-called translations that act more as denominational commentaries.

Here is what I have to offer in thoughts on this passage. Their lives, like ours today, was a battle (I Timothy 6:12). That battle is a spiritual one (II Corinthians 10:1-5). Our armor and weaponry are spiritual (Ephesians 6:10-17 and I Thessalonians 5:8). Sin is a battle against our own carnal desires (James 1:13-16). Meaning, it is an internal battle (Galatians 5:16-17 and I Peter 2:11). If we surrender to sin we lose our souls (Romans 6:23 and Revelation 21:8). What they were or were not doing needed some correction. That is clear in the coming passages of Scripture.

They were not resisting; standing against something regarding the shedding of blood. That could mean various things. For example, when there was false doctrines being taught in Antioch the Holy Ghost, the Apostles, and the congregation in Jerusalem sent a letter to Antioch. Notice what was said: *“It seemed good unto us, being assembled with one accord, to send chosen men unto you with our beloved Barnabas and Paul, Men that have hazarded their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. We have sent therefore Judas and Silas, who shall also tell you the same things by mouth. For it seemed good to the Holy Ghost, and to us, to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things; That ye abstain from meats offered to idols, and from blood, and from things strangled, and from fornication: from which if ye keep yourselves, ye shall do well. Fare ye well”* (Acts 15:25-29). This is one possibility.

There is another possibility that could make sense too. The book of James was written to early first century Jewish Christians at the time they were scattered from Jerusalem (James 1:1; cf. Acts 8:1-4). In that letter plenty of transgressions among those saints was addressed. Among those errors was that some of the wealthy ones were committing acts of violence against the just (James 5:1-6). Remember, some Jews converted to Christ but then were soon removed (Galatians 1:1-6:18). We even have Jesus warning the disciples that some of the Jews would kill the faithful thinking they were doing God service (John 16:1-3). It is possible there was some of that spillover into apostate saints. That seems less likely than the former (abstaining from animal blood), but is not entirely out of the question. Maybe there are other possibilities too. That’s where I am going to leave it. I am just not sure one way or another.