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Sermon Notes

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The Church's Commitment to Holiness

Hebrews 12:12-17

I. Strengthen Your Weak Members for the Race (vs. 12-13)

Hebrews 12:12-13 Therefore, strengthen your feeble arms and weak knees. ¹³ "Make level paths for your feet," so that the lame may not be disabled, but rather healed.

A. Context: The Challenges of the Christian Life

1. Hebrews in general: a persecuted and suffering church, tempted to turn away from Christ
2. Immediate context: running a race + chastisement for sin
 - a. The race is a long-distance event... not a sprint
 - i) It will take everything you have to finish
 - ii) You have to lay aside every weight and the sin that so easily entangles you
 - b. So also God brings serious chastisements on His children for sin... He does this so that we may share in His holiness... and no discipline seems pleasant but painful

B. So... Temptation to Become Discouraged in the Christian Life

C. Command: Strengthen Feeble Arms and Weak Knees!!

1. Greek word: "lift up" as if rebuilding a fallen structure... picture a building that has mostly crumbled because of a storm or age or an earthquake... to rebuild it = to lift it up
2. "weak feeble arms and weak knees" ... well known phrase from Isaiah 35
 - a. The prophet had been predicting the judgment of Israel by the nations for their sins
 - b. BUT always the promise also of divine restoration after the chastening
 - c. Isaiah 35 likens this divine restoration to the blooming of a desert

Isaiah 35:1-2 The desert and the parched land will be glad; the wilderness will rejoice and blossom. Like the crocus, ² it will burst into bloom; it will rejoice greatly and shout for joy. ... they will see the glory of the LORD, the splendor of our God.

Isaiah 35:3-6 Strengthen the feeble hands, steady the knees that give way; ⁴ say to those with fearful hearts, "Be strong, do not fear; your God will come, he will come with vengeance; with divine retribution he will come to save you." ⁵ Then will the eyes of the blind be opened and the ears of the deaf unstopped. ⁶ Then will the lame leap like a deer, and the mute tongue shout for joy. Water will gush forth in the wilderness and streams in the desert.

3. The author applies that to the Hebrew Christians

- a. It is BOTH internal—something you do for yourself—and external, something you do for each other
- b. It doesn't specify WHOSE arms are feeble and whose knees have become weak and wobbly
- c. We are to look out for each other, to encourage each other, to build each other up and not allow each other to get weary and discouraged and thus GIVE UP IN THE WAY!!!

D. This is the Primary Responsibility of Elders/Pastors

1. As undershepherds of Christ's flock, elders are to be very aware of the spiritual condition of the flock... their temptations, their afflictions, their weakness and struggles
2. This is the essence of what it means to care for Christ's sheep... to feed them and bind up the brokenhearted; to prop up and lift up and hold up what is drooping and sagging and weak

E. This is ALSO the Responsibility of All of Us

"We will watch over one another in brotherly love."

Hebrews 3:12-13 See to it, brothers, that none of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God. ¹³ But encourage one another daily, as long as it is called Today, so that none of you may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness.

F. ALSO: "Make Level Paths for Your Feet"

1. The author is quoting Proverbs 4

***Proverbs 4:25-27 Let your eyes look straight ahead, fix your gaze directly before you.
²⁶ Make level paths for your feet and take only ways that are firm. ²⁷ Do not swerve to the right or the left; keep your foot from evil.***

2. Greek: refers to the marks made by cart wheels... a path that can be followed by others
3. So, verse 12 refers to our HEART ATTITUDES... our demeanor... our morale... our weariness
4. Verse 13 refers to our DAILY PATHS... how we are living... what trails we are leaving for others to follow
5. We are to watch over the paths our daily walk... to make those paths completely STRAIGHT by the standards of God's word

Illus. Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*... Christian and Hopeful travelling to the Celestial City, grow weary in the path and see that it's only going to get harder for the immediate future; they make a fateful decision to leave the straight and narrow way and hop the fence into "Bypath Meadow"... the path ran alongside the true path and seemed no different; but it eventually led further and further away from the true path and soon they were captured by the Giant Despair and led to Doubting Castle...

The lesson is clear... STAY IN THE PATH MARKED OUT IN THE WORD... don't swerve to the right or the left, left you make trouble for yourselves

II. Pursue Peace with Everyone (vs. 14)

Hebrews 12:14 Make every effort to live in peace with all men and to be holy; without holiness no one will see the Lord.

A. "Make every effort" = lit. "pursue"

1. Press after peace, as the persecutor pursues and presses after him that he persecutes
2. Earnest, eager, passionate, incessant pursuit

B. Goal: Peace with all people

Psalms 34:14 Turn from evil and do good; seek peace and pursue it.

1. "Peace with all" specifically, all people
2. Perhaps meaning right relationships generally with every human being, no matter who they are

Romans 12:18 If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.

3. Perhaps including non-Christian persecutors and opposers
 - a. Not hold grudges or seek revenge

Matthew 5:44 But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you

- b. Many in church history have been won to Christ by the astonishing graciousness of Christians that they have persecuted
- c. Prime example: Stephen and Saul of Tarsus

Acts 7:60 - 8:1 Then he fell on his knees and cried out, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them." When he had said this, he fell asleep. Acts 8:1 And Saul was there, giving approval to his death.

Illustration: Extreme Forgiveness...

C. Most Likely: Peace with Other Christians

1. Unity of the church... not having divisions or factions
2. Constant strain on church relationships: the world, the flesh, the devil, ripping at our unity
3. "Peace with everyone" = sweet harmony in church relationships
 - a. Forgiveness of all past sins
 - b. Delight in each other
 - c. Deep desire for the other person's blessedness
4. So many verses in the NT speak of this need to work for peace and unity in relationships:

Ephesians 4:3 Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.

Romans 14:19 Let us therefore make every effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification.

Philippians 2:1-4 If you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any fellowship with the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, ² then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose. ³ Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. ⁴ Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others.

Philippians 4:2 I plead with Euodia and I plead with Syntyche to agree with each other in the Lord.

1 Corinthians 1:10 I appeal to you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another so that there may be no divisions among you and that you may be perfectly united in mind and thought.

Galatians 5:14-15 The entire law is summed up in a single command: "Love your neighbor as yourself." ¹⁵ If you keep on biting and devouring each other, watch out or you will be destroyed by each other.

D. Practical Applications Here at FBC

1. Forgiveness of all sins: “forgive as the Lord forgave you”; parable of the 10,000 talents
2. Romans 14: not flaunting your freedoms or judging others
3. Deeply caring for each other’s needs; praying for each other
4. Shepherding each other: watching over one another in brotherly love

III. Pursue Holiness... Or You Won't See God (vs. 14)

A. NEXT WEEK!!!

- B. There is a holiness that you must pursue through immense effort without which you will not see the Lord

IV. Oversee Yourselves in the Grace of Salvation (vs. 15-16)

Hebrews 12:15-16 See to it that no one misses the grace of God and that no bitter root grows up to cause trouble and defile many. ¹⁶ See that no one is sexually immoral, or is godless ...

A. “See to it that No One...”

1. Corporate focus: watching over one another in brotherly love
2. A consistent theme throughout the book of Hebrews... here also

Hebrews 3:12-13 See to it, brothers, that none of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God. ¹³ But encourage one another daily, as long as it is called Today, so that none of you may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness.

3. Greek word for “see to it” is “episkopeo” from which we get the English word “overseer” or elder; it is a shepherding verse... spiritual oversight

4. BUT the word is addressed to the whole church concerning the whole church
5. This is where we get the concept in our Church Covenant: “We will watch over one another in brotherly love”
6. We are to SEE TO IT THAT NO ONE MISSES THE GRACE OF GOD... that no bitter root grows up to defile many... that no one is sexually immoral or godless
7. Application: this shepherding responsibility is NOT JUST FOR THE ELDERS; but this verse should be very important for the elders
8. Pray for the elders to live this out; pray for the whole church to live this out

B. That No One Misses the Grace of God

1. What does this mean? To “miss the grace of God”
2. ESV: “fails to obtain”... perhaps “come short of”
3. Again, the issue is apostasy... of someone running for a while, but not obtaining the ultimate goal of the grace of God: eternity in heaven
4. The focus here is GRACE... someone can fail of the grace of God by not understand the grace of God in Christ... the sovereign grace of regeneration, justification, sanctification... ALL OF GOD, ALL IN CHRIST
5. The issue here is a corporate concern for each other’s salvation... is everyone who was running the race with us a year ago still running with us now??
6. Ask in the language of Hebrews 12:15: Is _____ missing the grace of God? Or are they still flourishing in God’s saving grace?

C. That No Bitter Root Grows Up

1. What is this “bitter root”?? Bitterness leaves a NASTY taste in your mouth

Illus. Cholorquin (anti-malarial medicine)... quinine is an EXCEPTIONALLY BITTER substance... melted in my mouth and I had the bitter taste for a couple of hours

2. A root is something that is hidden below the surface which, if undealt with, grows into the full plant
3. This is a root of bitterness... contrasted with the grace of God just mentioned... a root that is bitter itself and causes bitterness
4. The context of relational peace implies that this bitterness is a settled UNFORGIVENESS between people; bitterness is a long-standing, hidden poison in the relationship because of unforgiven sin

Ephesians 4:31-32 Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. ³² Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.

a. Unforgiveness is a hidden, bitter root

5. BUT: Old Testament context... idolatry... transition to next verse

Deuteronomy 29:16-18 You yourselves know how we lived in Egypt and how we passed through the countries on the way here. ¹⁷ You saw among them their detestable images and idols of wood and stone, of silver and gold. ¹⁸ Make sure there is no man or woman, clan or tribe among you today whose heart turns away from the LORD our God to go and worship the gods of those nations; make sure there is no root among you that produces such bitter poison.

6. The whole community is poisoned when any one of us goes after an immoral lifestyle of sin and idolatry

7. The real issue here is that HIDDEN HEART of unbelief... of godlessness, delighting in the things of this world (sexual pleasure, a good meal) and despising the grace of God in salvation

8. Such a PERSON is a hidden apostate waiting to make himself known more publicly... his heart of unbelief is a ROOT OF BITTERNESS that at some point will grow up and cause trouble and defile many

9. In the ongoing ministry of the church, we must WATCH OVER ONE ANOTHER IN BROTHERLY LOVE to keep true believers from falling into such sin patterns

10. AND we must expose false believers who can at some point defile many others

11. aa

D. That No One is Sexually Immoral or Godless

1. Sexual immorality is a tremendous temptation... a constant assault on one of the weakest parts of the fortress of our souls

2. The word here is FORNICATION... usually taken to mean sex between unmarried persons

a. In the ancient Greek world, this was seen to be of trifling consequence

b. Even Jews considered sexual relations with pagans to be benign

c. But the gospel of Jesus Christ has come to show us the true danger of sexual sin

3. Adam and Eve in Eden

a. Genesis 2

Genesis 2:25 The man and his wife were both naked, and they felt no shame

b. Genesis 3

Genesis 3:7 Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realized they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves.

4. This leaves a chink in the armor, a breach in the wall that Satan zeroes in on constantly

5. Jesus Christ made it plain that sexual immorality begins in the HEART

Matthew 5:27-30 "You have heard that it was said, 'Do not commit adultery.' ²⁸ But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart. ²⁹ If your right eye causes you to sin, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. ³⁰ And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to go into hell.

6. The world/flesh/devil START HERE: Constant sexual temptation

a. The ongoing assault on the male eye

b. The continual portrayal of beautiful young women to allure and entice the heart into secret sexual sin is one of the great assaults on our souls as godly men

c. These depictions are everywhere: on TV, in movies, on the internet, on the smart phones, in the mall, in the catalogs for clothing that depict women in enticing clothing... it is a constant barrage... in incessant assault on MANSOUL

d. Thus Jesus said:

Matthew 6:22-23 "The eye is the lamp of the body. If your eyes are good, your whole body will be full of light. ²³ But if your eyes are bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light within you is darkness, how great is that darkness!

- e. Sexual sin is so serious that Paul commanded that sexually immoral people be expelled from the congregation:

1 Corinthians 5:6-7 Don't you know that a little yeast works through the whole batch of dough? ⁷ Get rid of the old yeast...

1 Corinthians 5:9-13 I have written you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral people-- ¹⁰ not at all meaning the people of this world who are immoral, or the greedy and swindlers, or idolaters. In that case you would have to leave this world. ¹¹ But now I am writing you that you must not associate with anyone who calls himself a brother but is sexually immoral or greedy, an idolater or a slanderer, a drunkard or a swindler. With such a man do not even eat. ¹² What business is it of mine to judge those outside the church? Are you not to judge those inside? ¹³ God will judge those outside. "Expel the wicked man from among you."

7. For the young women, this passage is a serious warning to maintain absolute sexual purity: to guard against compromise in this area; to seek relationships with young men who are honorable and ready for marriage and who will not selfishly take advantage of your desire for love and affection by forcing you to compromise in this VITAL AREA!!

E. Application

1. Commitment to purity
2. Taking Jesus' advice: if it causes you to sin, CUT IT OUT OF YOUR
3. Accountability
4. Constant vigilance
5. Confess and receive grace/mercy... BUT STOP SINNING!!
6. To the church: be ready to follow the clear commands here... that there be NO ONE AMONG US who is sexually immoral... to be willing to "expel the wicked man from among us"

V. A Picture of Apostasy: The Godlessness of Esau (vs. 16-17)

Hebrews 12:16-17 See that no one is sexually immoral, or is godless like Esau, who for a single meal sold his inheritance rights as the oldest son. ¹⁷ Afterward, as you know, when he wanted to inherit this blessing, he was rejected. He could bring about no change of mind, though he sought the blessing with tears.

A. Esau's Godlessness

1. The word means to be SECULAR as a committed pattern of life

2. At core, to be atheistic and profane... to MAKE LIGHT of the gospel realities as though they were fables, fantasies
3. To “Profane” a sacred space is to DEFILE IT, to mock it... ultimately to DESPISE it
 - a. Remember that Jesus, for the joy set before Him, endured the cross, DESPISING its shame
 - b. This means He considered the SHAME of this world as a SMALL TRIFLE, hardly worth mentioning in comparison with the salvation of our eternal souls
 - c. But here, Esau considered the THINGS OF GOD as NOTHING... he “despised his birthright”

Genesis 25:29-34 *Once when Jacob was cooking some stew, Esau came in from the open country, famished. ³⁰ He said to Jacob, "Quick, let me have some of that red stew! I'm famished!" (That is why he was also called Edom.) ³¹ Jacob replied, "First sell me your birthright." ³² "Look, I am about to die," Esau said. "What good is the birthright to me?" ³³ But Jacob said, "Swear to me first." So he swore an oath to him, selling his birthright to Jacob. ³⁴ Then Jacob gave Esau some bread and some lentil stew. He ate and drank, and then got up and left. So Esau despised his birthright.*

4. This is the EXACT OPPOSITE of the mentality of faith that the author has been celebrating in this sublime book:
 - a. People who welcomed the confiscation of their property while being persecuted because THEY KNEW they had better and lasting possessions
 - b. People who confessed that they were aliens and strangers in this world, just passing through, heading for a City of ETERNAL BEAUTY whose builder and maker is God
 - c. People who were looking for nothing lasting or permanent in this world, like Moses, who rejected the temporary pleasures of sin in Egypt so he could have God’s blessing, FOR HE WAS LOOKING AHEAD TO HIS REWARD
5. BUT EASU was the exact opposite to this
 - a. Born in the godly lineage of the redemptive plan of God... the grandson of Abraham, the chosen man, through whose offspring all peoples on earth would be blessed
 - b. He grew up hearing from Isaac and Rebekah of the significance of those glorious promises, and all that God planned for him

- c. His father Isaac cherished him and certainly told him of the promises made on Mt. Moriah when Abraham had almost killed Isaac: your descendents will take possession of the gates of their enemies, and through them all peoples on earth will be blessed
- d. Esau, as the firstborn, would be heir to all this
- e. Problem was, it was a kingdom of FAITH and he simply DID NOT BELIEVE
- f. His “god was his stomach”... he lived for sensual pleasures... for sex and food and a good hunt and good times
- g. He couldn’t look beyond the immediate situation... when his stomach was empty, it GROWLED and caused him pain
- h. That was a real as it gets... the BIRTHRIGHT... WHAT’S THAT??? You can’t taste it, touch it, feel it, hear it, or smell it... it ISN’T REAL
- i. So he spoke these fateful words:

Genesis 25:32 “What good is the birthright to me?”

- 6. So, in this world, there are people today who live for their immediate gratification... everything they do if for THIS WORLD...
- 7. Even when they store up treasure on earth to give to their posterity, their thoughts are on THIS WORLD... not on the New Heaven and New Earth
- 8. They think very little of the city that God is building, that city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God

B. Godlessness in the Church??

- 1. Are there Esaus here today? Profane men and women who think almost nothing of the heavenly promises that fill the scriptures
- 2. Are there Esaus here now? Who are truly living for their earthly appetites and sensual pleasures
- 3. It is so easy to do: to live for a nice care, a pretty house, a fun game, an attractive spouse, a degree from a prestigious institution... who love to study the LIFESTYLES OF THE RICH AND FAMOUS, and covet those lifestyles secretly
- 4. Who would love to win the lottery and never work another day in their lives

5. Are there any ESAUS here today? People who get easily bored with spiritual things, whose minds wander when the word of God is read and who can't wait to go do something they really enjoy
6. Can there actually be EASUS in a CHURCH?
7. The author of Hebrews wanted to make sure that we did not personally live that way, nor did we tolerate such a thing in the church

C. Esau Exposed Suddenly... and By Decades of Unrepentance

1. The offer from Jacob caught him unawares; he had just come in from the field and was famished... his god was his stomach and it was calling to him; he didn't realize that he was being led to a FATEFUL CHOICE

“who for a SINGLE MEAL sold his inheritance rights as firstborn son...”

2. The author emphasizes the SINGLE MEAL aspect... it was of such little value to him
3. What is Christ worth to you? What are YOUR INHERITANCE RIGHTS as FIRSTBORN worth to you?

Hebrews 12:23 to the church of the firstborn, whose names are written in heaven.

4. How much would you sell your place in heaven for?
5. Esau's godlessness was exposed in ONE FATEFUL encounter... but his heart was confirmed by decades of unrepentance on this very matter
6. The rent came due on that fateful day as many as 50 or 60 years later when Isaac lay, so he thought, dying on his bed, and he wanted to give his patriarchal blessing to Esau, his firstborn
7. He'd had 50 or 60 years, maybe, to repent... to think differently about the spiritual heritage of Abraham... but Esau was GODLESS... his thoughts even concerning the blessing were ENTIRELY EARTHLY
- 8.

D. Esau's Wailing Misery

1. When he realized that Jacob had swindled him not only out of his birthright but also out of his blessing, he CRIED OUT IN ABJECT MISERY
2. The misery was REAL... but it was NOT FAITH-FILLED... it was that worldly sorrow that leads to death

3. The rocky soil hearer of the word receives the word WITH JOY... but it is not the JOY OF FAITH
4. Esau received this news with intense SORROW and EARNEST PLEADINGS: "Bless me too, my father... bless me too!" But it was not based on faith
5. He could not bring about Isaac's change of mind... it was NEVER GODWARD
6. Do not imagine that anyone who comes to God in the earnestness and misery of sin and seeks forgiveness will EVER BE REJECTED!!! NEVER!!!

John 6:37 All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never drive away.

Romans 10:13 "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved."

7. Esau's SHOCK came in realizing that the despising of his birthright so many years ago was now confirmed in the loss of his blessing

VI. Applications

- A. Come to Christ
- B. Shepherd One Another's Feeble Arms and Weak Knees
- C. Shepherd One Another in Peace: Forgive!!! No Bitterness
- D. Embrace a Life of Personal Holiness (More Next Week)
- E. Shepherd One Another in Sexual Purity
- F. Shepherd One Another Against Worldliness
- G. Be Warned by Esau