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Sermon Notes

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God's Loving Warnings Essential to Our Salvation

Romans 11:17-22

Introduction

Observation deck, top of the World Trade Center: Warning signs, curved fence; electrified rails

DON'T GO HERE!!!

Fear keeps us safe

Two key moments in Redemptive History: David, finally bringing the Ark of the Covenant into Jerusalem; the Ark of the Covenant was a gold-covered box in which the Law of Moses was kept; God met with Israel in the cherubim above the Ark, so that the Ark represented the very presence of God to the Jews. God had given specific instructions on how it was to be transported: with acacia wood poles slid through the rings on the side, carried by Levites. But that day they did not carefully pay attention to God's commands for carrying the Ark and they put it on an oxcart. Well, the entourage proceeded toward Jerusalem, with David the King singing and celebrating and worshipping... it was a huge celebration, a major occasion of joy. Suddenly, without warning the oxen stumbled, and a man named Uzzah reached out and grabbed the Ark and stabilized it...**BUT GOD STRUCK UZZAH DEAD FOR DOING IT**

Instantly the singing stopped... David stopped dancing before the Lord... they looked dumbfounded at the dead man, Uzzah, who lay in the mud. The reaction was immediate and predictable: FEAR

2 Samuel 6:9 David was afraid of the LORD that day and said, "How can the ark of the LORD ever come to me?"

Second: It was during the time of the apostles, when the early church of Jesus Christ was growing every day and more and more people were being saved. There were no needy persons in the early church, for from time to time people used to sell lands or houses and bring the money from the sale and put it at the apostles' feet and it was distributed to anyone as he had need.

But one day a man named Ananias, together with his wife Sapphira, also sold a piece of property. With his wife's full knowledge he kept back part of the money for himself, but brought the rest and put it at the apostle's feet.

Again, it was a happy occasion, a time of celebration at the goodness of God! The Apostle Peter asked Ananias a simple question: "Tell me, was this the full price you got for the land?" Ananias answered, "Yes!"

Acts 5:3-5 Then Peter said, "Ananias, how is it that Satan has so filled your heart that you have lied to the Holy Spirit and have kept for yourself some of the money you received for the land? ⁴ Didn't it belong to you before it was sold? And after it was sold, wasn't the money at your disposal? What made you think of doing such a thing? You have not lied to men but to God." ⁵ When Ananias heard this, he fell down and died. And great fear seized all who heard what had happened.

GREAT FEAR! The FEAR OF THE LORD

That is the issue before us in Romans 11... the role of fear in the Christian life. The role of warnings in the Christian life

I. The Reality of Warnings in the Christian Life

A. This Passage is a Warning to Gentile Christians

1. Paul is revealing the future of Israel... a great encouragement for our faith
2. Paul is displaying the glory of our sovereign God, His power in salvation
3. Paul is also directly addressing Gentile Christians in their attitude toward the Jews

Romans 11:13 I am talking to you Gentiles.

4. The Roman church was mixed... Jew and Gentile
 - a. Almost certainly the Gentile Christians outnumbered their Jewish brothers and sisters
 - b. Paul wants the Gentiles to understand some things about the failure of the Jews to believe in Christ
 - i) First: God's word has not failed (Romans 9:6)
 - ii) Second: God's sovereignty over individual salvation through unconditional election (9:6-24) results in some individuals, both Jews and Gentiles, trusting Christ... and others, both Jews and Gentiles, hardened against Christ

- iii) Third: Israel stumbled over the stumbling stone, Christ, because they sought to establish their own righteousness through the law (9:33-10:4)
- iv) Fourth: Israel is not rejected as a nation, nor have they stumbled so as to fall... God has a glorious future for the Jews as He has promised
- c. This is the time of Israel's great humiliation, as God has given them a spirit of stupor, eyes that do not see and ears that do not hear
- d. BUT there is a great danger now on the Gentile side of ARROGANCE, of nationalistic PRIDE over the Jews
- e. For Paul, this would be devastating... especially since this nationalistic pride was the very thing that led to the Jews downfall

B. Warning from Spiritual Pride

Romans 11:17-18 do not boast over those branches.

Romans 11:19-20 Do not be arrogant, but be afraid.

Romans 11:25-26 I do not want you to be ignorant of this mystery, brothers, so that you may not be conceited: Israel has experienced a hardening in part until the full number of the Gentiles has come in. ²⁶ *And so all Israel will be saved*

Clearly Paul is deeply concerned that the Gentile Christians not be spiritually arrogant over their present position. Yes, they stand in Christ... yes they are grafted into the life-giving olive tree... yes, Jewish branches were broken off so that they could be grafted in,, BUT THIS SHOULD NOT MAKE THEM ARROGANT OR PRIDEFUL... rather, it should make them tremble and hold onto Christ by faith and repentance even more than before

C. Warning to Spiritual Perseverance in Faith

Romans 11:19-20 You will say then, "Branches were broken off so that I could be grafted in." ²⁰ Granted. But they were broken off because of unbelief, and you stand by faith. Do not be arrogant, but be afraid.

Romans 11:22 Consider therefore the kindness and sternness of God: sternness to those who fell, but kindness to you, provided that you continue in his kindness.

Again and again Scripture tells us of the need to stand by faith, to persevere to the end, to continue in the grace of God

Matthew 10:22, 24:13 he who stands firm to the end will be saved.

D. Warning of Spiritual Disaster

Vs. 21 For if God did not spare the natural branches, he will not spare you either.

Romans 11:22 Consider therefore the kindness and sternness of God: sternness to those who fell, but kindness to you, provided that you continue in his kindness. Otherwise, you also will be cut off.

Clear implication: being cut off means being separated from Christ, with its ultimate end of eternal condemnation:

Matthew 7:21-23 "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. ²² Many will say to me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?' ²³ Then I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!'

The words, "Away from me" are the moment of eternal separation from Christ, when the false branches, the ones that do not bear the fruit natural to the tree are cut off and thrown into the fire and burned.

Paul is basically warning the Gentiles from an arrogance that reveals a true state of unbelief, unrepentance

The threat is the direst imaginable: eternity cut off from Christ

Summary warning: vs. 20: You stand by faith, so do not be arrogant but be afraid!

E. There Are Many Warnings to Christians in the Bible

1. Romans 11:17-22 is not the only warning given to Christians in the Bible
2. Jesus warned in the Sermon on the Mount

Matthew 5:28-29 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.

3. The Book of Hebrews is full of dire warnings
 - a. Don't drift away from Christ because of neglecting spiritual disciplines (2:1)
 - b. Don't turn away in unbelief because of the deceitfulness of sin (3:12-14)
 - c. Don't fall away through apostasy (6:4-6)

- d. Every one of these warnings carries with it some threat in the Book of Hebrews... the most powerful of these is in Hebrews 10:

Hebrews 10:26-27 If we deliberately keep on sinning after we have received the knowledge of the truth, no sacrifice for sins is left, ²⁷ but only a fearful expectation of judgment and of raging fire that will consume the enemies of God.

4. Paul himself uses the experience of the Jews in the desert to warn the Corinthian Christians against sin and apostasy
- a. Paul says the Jews all experienced something like baptism when they went through the Red Sea with Moses
 - b. That the Jews all experienced something like the Lord's Supper when they ate the manna for forty years
 - c. They all experienced drinking from Christ in some spiritual sense

1 Corinthians 10:5-12 Nevertheless, God was not pleased with most of them; their bodies were scattered over the desert. ⁶ Now these things occurred as examples to keep us from setting our hearts on evil things as they did. ⁷ Do not be idolaters, as some of them were; as it is written: "The people sat down to eat and drink and got up to indulge in pagan revelry." ⁸ We should not commit sexual immorality, as some of them did-- and in one day twenty-three thousand of them died. ⁹ We should not test the Lord, as some of them did-- and were killed by snakes. ¹⁰ And do not grumble, as some of them did-- and were killed by the destroying angel. ¹¹ These things happened to them as examples and were written down as warnings for us, on whom the fulfillment of the ages has come. ¹² So, if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall!

Thus there are many dire warnings given to Christians in the Bible

F. Key Issue: True vs. False Branches

1. The Olive Tree analogy:
 - a. The tree represents the people of God
 - b. Outside that tree there is no salvation
 - c. Inside that tree there is life-giving sap flowing to all true branches
 - d. BUT the tree can have false branches attached to it
 - i) Arrogant, unbelieving Jews (physically descended from Abraham) were false branches

- ii) Arrogant, unbelieving Gentile church attenders who boast over sinners and who do not continue in the kindness of God are false branches too
- 2. Paul says that Jews were broken off from the Olive Tree
- 3. Paul says that arrogant unbelieving Gentiles will also be broken off from the Olive Tree
- 4. The key issue is: am I genuinely grafted into Christ? Does the life-giving sap flow through me?
- 5. The key diagnostic is: is there any fruit in my life consistent with being grafted into Christ?

BY THEIR FRUIT YOU WILL KNOW THEM!!!!

AND... arrogant boasting over fallen sinners is TOTALLY INCONSISTENT with saving faith

Saving faith makes us humble and broken about sin... not boastful

II. The Resistance to Warnings in the Christian Life

A. "Once Saved, Always Saved"

- 1. The doctrine of the eternal security of the believer is precious and true
- 2. Paul has already labored greatly in Romans to give true believers a lasting security and assurance in Christ

Romans 5:9-10 *Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him! ¹⁰ For if, when we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life!*

Romans 8:1 *Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus*

Romans 8:29-30 *For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. ³⁰ And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified.*

Romans 8:38 -39 *For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, ³⁹ neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

3. Many other passages teach it too:

John 6:39-40 And this is the will of him who sent me, that I shall lose none of all that he has given me, but raise them up at the last day. ⁴⁰ For my Father's will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day."

John 10:27-30 My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. ²⁸ I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand. ²⁹ My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father's hand. ³⁰ I and the Father are one."

4. The doctrine that a true Christian can NEVER lose his salvation, NEVER be lost to Christ, NEVER be condemned for sin is one of the great jewels of the gospel
5. BUT, if this is true... why do we need to listen to dire warnings of being lost?
 - a. If there's no condemnation for those in Christ, why do we need to listen to Christ's warnings about hell in connection with lust?
 - b. If nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ, why do we need to hear about the possibility that we Gentiles will be stripped off the Olive Tree if we are arrogant and unbelieving?
 - c. Why do we have to be told to continue in Christ, to keep believing, keep trusting, keep obeying, keep walking with Him if He has already promised that He'll lose NONE of all that the Father has given Him?

B. Failure to Distinguish Between Godly and Ungodly Fear

1. Another problem is the issue of the role of fear in the Christian life
2. This passage commands us to fear

Romans 11:20 Do not be arrogant, but be afraid.

3. Many other passages tell us what a wonderful thing the fear of the Lord is

Proverbs 1:7 The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and discipline.

Psalms 19:9 The fear of the LORD is pure, enduring forever.

Proverbs 14:27 The fear of the LORD is a fountain of life, turning a man from the snares of death.

Isaiah gave a prophecy about the Messiah, the Branch of Jesse, who is Christ:

Isaiah 11:3 he will delight in the fear of the LORD.

This is NOT just in the Old Testament:

Philippians 2:12 ...continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling

1 Peter 1:17 Since you call on a Father who judges each man's work impartially, live your lives as strangers here in reverent fear.

4. But other passages teach us that in some sense fear has no place in the Christian life

^{ESV} Romans 8:15 For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, "Abba! Father!"

1 John 4:18 There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love.

5. How to resolve this? Discerning between GODLY fear, and UNGODLY fear
- a. Godly fear: based on the truth of God and His word... it is based on faith
 - b. Ungodly fear: based on falsehood about God and His word... it is based on unbelief
 - c. More:

Godly fear is based on TRUTH and says “God is holy, He hates sin... If I sin, God may well strike out at me and discipline me. If I harden my heart in sins’ deceitfulness, it may well be that I never was a Christian to begin with. I don’t want to go there... I fear that outcome! I fear sin, and I fear God’s holy reaction to my sin. God did not spare the Jews when they rejected Christ... He will not spare me either if I turn away from Him.”

Ungodly fear is based on FALSEHOOD and says: “God is fickle and capricious... He is mean and demanding... I’m have to be a slave on His plantation, or He’ll send me to hell. I have to watch every step I make or He’ll smack me! I have to keep cranking out the good works to please Him, or He may become irrationally outraged at me and throw me into hell.” OR: “God’s promises can’t be trusted. Even though I believe that Christ is the Son of God, that He died on the cross for my sins, that I am a sinner with no right to demand forgiveness, even though I see the fruit of the Spirit in my life, and I love righteousness and hate wickedness, I might still wind up in hell... God may abandon me, or His promises may not be true for me, even if they are true for others.”

III. The Role of Warnings in the Christian Life

A. Warnings Reveal True vs. False Branches

1. There would be no need for warnings if there were no possibility of self-deception
2. Just because someone hangs around the church, or is active in the church's programs, does not mean they are genuinely ALIVE spiritually
3. The warnings here reveal the possibility that people may be self-deceived
4. Ultimately, the true believers produce fruit in keeping with repentance

Matthew 3:8-10 Produce fruit in keeping with repentance. ⁹ And do not think you can say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.' I tell you that out of these stones God can raise up children for Abraham. ¹⁰ The ax is already at the root of the trees, and every tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire.

Matthew 7:16-19 By their fruit you will recognize them. Do people pick grapes from thornbushes, or figs from thistles? ¹⁷ Likewise every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. ¹⁸ A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, and a bad tree cannot bear good fruit. ¹⁹ Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.

John 15:1-2 "I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. ² He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit

Galatians 5:22-23 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³ gentleness and self-control.

True branches produce true fruit

Among the greatest of that fruit is godly humility and the fear of the Lord

1 John 2:19 They went out from us, but they did not really belong to us. For if they had belonged to us, they would have remained with us; but their going showed that none of them belonged to us.

B. Warnings Reveal Spiritual Arrogance

1. One of the key issues of the Christian life: what do you do with a warning?
2. One of the essences of true faith is that we TAKE THESE WARNINGS SERIOUSLY
3. We humble ourselves and go to Christ with our fear and our sin, and we trust in Him, rest in Him, look to Him alone
4. BUT a spiritually arrogant person thinks they are EXEMPT from ALL warnings

5. They blow them off, don't take them seriously

Concerning spiritual warnings:

True believers NEED them, HEED them, and AVOID what they warn

False believers EXCUSE themselves from them, IGNORE them, and FULFILL them in the end

C. Warnings Produce Godly Fear, and Fear Keeps Us from Sin

Exodus 20:18-20 *When the people saw the thunder and lightning and heard the trumpet and saw the mountain in smoke, they trembled with fear. They stayed at a distance ¹⁹ and said to Moses, "Speak to us yourself and we will listen. But do not have God speak to us or we will die." ²⁰ Moses said to the people, "Do not be afraid. God has come to test you, so that the fear of God will be with you to keep you from sinning."*

Jeremiah 32:40 *I will make an everlasting covenant with them: I will never stop doing good to them, and I will inspire them to fear me, so that they will never turn away from me.*

Come Thou Fount of Every Blessing

O to grace how great a debtor
Daily I'm constrained to be!
Let Thy goodness, like a fetter,
Bind my wandering heart to Thee.
Prone to wander, Lord, I feel it,
Prone to leave the God I love;
Here's my heart, O take and seal it,
Seal it for Thy courts above.

God's goodness binds us close to Him... we yearn to be close to God and feel His goodness

So also does God's severity... we fear sin and God's holy reaction to it

D. Warnings Essential to Standing in Faith

1. Paul tells us "we stand by faith"

Romans 11:20 *But they were broken off because of unbelief, and you stand by faith. Do not be arrogant, but be afraid.*

2. The clear teaching here is that faith must be CONTINUALLY EXERCISED

3. Warnings continue to feed our faith because they cause us to trust God and to fear sin and to cling to Christ more than ever

E. Warnings Essential to Our Final Salvation

1. We are making our way through a world that is VIOLENTLY opposed to our salvation
2. We are aliens, pilgrims... or perhaps escaped P.O.W.'s making our way through enemy territory
3. There is danger on every side... even worse, there is danger within our own hearts
4. Imagine a fighter jet shot down and the pilot ejects in enemy territory during the Vietnam War... the enemy troops are swarming around the area but haven't found the pilot yet; his fellow pilots see everything from the air and know where he's hiding, how he's moving, and where the enemy troops are... their warnings not to turn right or left at critical moment will save his life and be the key to his making it out alive
5. So it is with us and these warnings... they are essential to our salvation

IV. The Relief of Warnings in the Christian Life

John Newton: “ ‘Twas grace that taught my heart to fear, and grace my fears relieved.’ ”

I believe this is a cycle that will go on the rest of our Christian lives

God's grace gives us warnings in the Bible; the Holy Spirit presses them close to us and warns us of dangers specifically in our lives; we repent, heed the warning, do a course correction and continue to make progress in the faith; the Spirit assures us that we are God's children and He is pleased with us... and our fears are relieved until some new danger comes

Paul gives two helps to relieve fear in this text

Consider

Continue

A. Consider

Romans 11:22 Consider therefore the kindness and sternness of God: sternness to those who fell, but kindness to you,

1. “Consider” = literally “See”, “Look at” “Gaze at”... “survey”

- a. Meditation on a twin theme
 - b. Thinking deeply about two things
 - c. Pondering with the mind's eye two issues
2. The kindness of God
- a. God's kindness is His grace, His mercy, His acceptance of us in Christ, His essential GOODNESS
 - b. His mildness and tenderness to us as a Father cherishes His children
 - c. The sweetness of fellowship with Him
 - d. The pleasure His communicates to Him when our lives are well-pleasing to God

How does meditation on the kindness of God protect us from sin? Simply, it is the positive attraction that makes sin seem worthless and totally unappealing

To savor God as your highest pleasure in life has a deadening effect on the power of sin

Especially when we meditate on God's grace and mercy in covering all our wretched sins, how can we be arrogant and boast over others who have fallen

So... consider how sweet and pleasant it is to have a clear conscience before God, to say NO to temptation and to feel the delightful inrush of the Spirit of God saying "Well done, my child! You stood firm in the day of testing and I am pleased with you! Enter by faith into a foretaste of my joy!"

SO... consider the kindness of God

3. The severity of God
- a. Consider also the severity of God
 - b. His terrifying wrath against sin
 - c. Stimulate your fear of God's holy wrath and His sharp and fatherly discipline

What did David feel when God struck Uzzah down for grabbing the Ark? FEAR

What did the early church feel when God struck Annanias and Sapphira down? FEAR

What should any of us feel when we consider the case of the hardening of the Jews against their own Messiah? FEAR

Consider the severity of God... ponder what He did to the ancient world when He brought the flood on its ungodly inhabitants

Consider the severity of God... ponder what He did to Sodom and Gomorrah when He brought the fire on its ungodly inhabitants

Consider the severity of God... ponder the misery of David after He committed adultery with Bathsheba... David's chronic illness as day after day his body wore away through sickness; the death of their newborn son despite David's earnest fasting and prayer; the fact that the sword never departed David's house again, but the latter part of his years as King were years of great suffering and trouble and distress

Consider the severity of God in stripping of Jewish people who refuse to trust in Christ, hardening their hearts against Him

Consider BOTH the kindness and severity of God

B. Continue

Romans 11:22 Consider therefore the kindness and sternness of God: sternness to those who fell, but kindness to you, provided that you continue in his kindness. Otherwise, you also will be cut off.

1. "Continue" = remain, stay, persist, persevere, keep on going
2. Walking by faith
3. Repenting from sin
4. Humbling yourself
5. Bearing fruit in every good work
6. Staying close to Christ

V. Application

A. Take all Biblical warnings seriously... don't excuse yourself from anyone of them

1. Just because you believe "Once saved, always saved" doesn't mean you are exempt from heeding God's warnings
2. Consider that the warnings are essential to God's finishing His good work in your life
3. Consider that you are prone to wander from God through sin... through the weakness of the flesh

4. Take every warning seriously and bring it to Christ... let Him assure you by His Spirit that there is presently no danger

5. Then maintain an attitude to constant vigilance over that sin

B. Learn to be totally humble about the grievous power of sin

1. When you see someone else fall into sin, do not gloat, do not boast, do not feel superior, do not feel smug

2. Learn to say "There but for the grace of God go I"

3. Edwards' resolution:

Resolved, to act, in all respects, both speaking and doing, as if nobody had been so vile as I, and as if I had committed the same sins, or had the same infirmities or failings as others; and that I will let the knowledge of their failings promote nothing but shame in myself, and prove only an occasion of my confessing my own sins and misery to God

4. Be totally humble about the sins of others... be gentle in going to them to restore them

5. I YEARN FOR FBC to be the most humble and broken-hearted congregation on earth in the matter of sin... that we can deal gently with other humbled sinners

C. Learn to Meditate on ALL that God is

1. Meditate deeply on the goodness of God... His incredible grace to you in Christ, His magnificent promises for heaven and for a glory you cannot describe

2. BUT ALSO: Meditate deeply on the severity of God... His great hatred of sin, His absolute determination that His people be holy and pure

3. Learn to fear His disciplines... if you harden your heart, learn to fear His wrath, for it may be that a prolonged lifestyle of willful sin may prove that you were never saved to begin with

D. Stand by Faith... Moment by Moment

E. Evangelize as a humble, broken-hearted sinner... not as a self-righteous Pharisee

F. Parent like this: a good blend of goodness and severity as needed

1. Too many parents desire only to be best friends with their children and neglect dealing severely with their sin

2. BUT there are also some parents who deal overwhelmingly in harshness and severity and do not present to their children a BALANCED view of God... His gentleness and kindness in Christ

G. Test Yourself to See if You Are In the Faith