Falling Short of God's Grace

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[0:00] I'm convinced that the vast majority of the church, especially in the West, which would include Western Europe, Canada, are populated, those churches are populated with people who have never and will never make a commitment to the Lord Jesus Christ.

I see this played out all the time. I've traveled all over Europe and it's dark over there. Canada's a basket case.
You lived up there next door. Well, these people sit under the preaching, some of them, of the Word of God, even the correct preaching.
And they listen to correct doctrine. They have knowledge of sorts, but they fall short of the grace of God.
They're one day going to be shocked to hear Jesus say, I never knew you.
[1:57] That's Matthew 7, 21 to 23. That's a disturbing passage. I never knew you. Depart from me. Many will go down into hell pleading their case that they've done many wonderful things for the Lord, but their pleas are going to fall on deaf ears.

Surely there is nothing more frightening than falling short of the grace of God. If we had a real grasp of that possibility, I think it would change everything we do as we seek to serve and worship the Lord.
So today we're going to talk about falling short of God's grace. That's actually a subtitle for our lesson, Falling Short of God's Grace. Hebrews chapter 12, beginning in verse 12.
Therefore, strengthen the hands that are weak and the knees that are feeble, and make straight paths for your feet, so that the limb, which is lame, may not be put out of joint, but rather be healed. Pursue peace with men, and the sanctification without which no one will see the Lord. See to it that no one comes short of the grace of God, that no root of bitterness springing up causes trouble, and by it many will be defiled, that there will be no immoral or godless person like Esau, who sold his own birthright for a single meal.
[4:12] For you know that even afterwards, when he desired to inherit the blessing, he was rejected. For he found no place for repentance, though he sought for it with tears.

And I think most of us remember the story about Esau, the twin brother to Jacob. A number of years ago, we had a member of the church staff who decided to leave.
He had a vision that he was going to start his own church. This was many years ago. We didn't quite measure up. And actually, he started the church with some initial success.
I believe at one time, he had between 400 and 500 people attending. Today, I'm told that he has a group of about 15 people that meeting is home.
And it's certainly not my purpose to be critical here, or even inquisitive, as to what happened to bring this about. But I do remember, quite vividly, a conversation this former member had with Dr. McBride during a chance meeting in the community.
[5:47] Mike asked him, how's your church going? And he said, fine. Fine. And I said, well, good. And after some period of pleasantries, Mike said to this former church member, he said, what essentially is your doctrine?

What does your doctrine consist of? He knew he had some aberrant theology when he left here. And the man really kind of bristled. And he said, we don't have any doctrine.
We don't teach doctrine. Doctrine is divisive. Doctrine splits churches. Brothers, doctrine is foundational.
Doctrine is the glue that holds everything together. Without correct doctrine, the church is but a house of cards fit for destruction at the first opposing wind.
And the winds will blow. So what do I mean by doctrine? Bible doctrine is God's truth.

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[7:16] That may be the simplest and yet most profound definition we can come up with. It's God's truth. And apart from God's truth, we cannot know Him or in the final analysis, we can't, without knowing Him, can't even know ourselves in our cosmic setting with God, in His cosmic setting, with us.

Without doctrine, we will not understand how God views us, nor will we grasp what it is He wants us to do.
Apart from doctrine, we have no basis for faith, obedience, even love directed to Him simply because without doctrine, we cannot know the essentials concerning the triune God.
That's where we learn about Him. So I want to repeat that doctrine is the foundation. And like any foundation, we want to build our structure upon it.
And in that regard, I can say with authority that the Bible contains more than just doctrine. it also contains exhortation for living out the truths that are taught in the Word of God.
[9:01] We can say that salvation is a two-headed coin, a two-sided coin. faith. On one side, we read this word, faith.

And on the other side, we turn that coin over and we read repentance. But for the truly saved person, there's another coin we should carry around in our pockets.
One side of that coin says, know and believe. That's one side. Flip it over, live and obey.
These come together when a church has, as its ministers, those who participate in the plan God has for His church.
They actually carry around a coin that says, preach and teach. What does this latter coin mean?
[10:13] For the preacher and teacher, it means to exhort and to admonish. The role of the minister is to teach right doctrine and then carry it a step further to exhort right living.

The role of the Christian is to know right doctrine and to pursue right living. Now, when we come to our focal passage today, we see teaching joined to exhortation.
And by the word exhortation, I mean to urge or advise strongly. And in that guard, the writer of the book of Hebrews will use words such as strengthen, make straight, pursue, and see to it.
And those are powerful words used to urge and advise the writer desires to teach truth to his congregation, this Jewish congregation somewhere outside of Israel, and then to urge them to live up to the truth that has been taught and the book of Hebrews contains great and eternal truth.
But the ultimate purpose of the book is found in the final chapter, which is the next chapter, chapter 13, verse 22, verse 22, it says this, I appeal to you brothers, bear with my word of exhortation, for I have written to you briefly.
[12:18] Well, it took us a long time to get there for a brief deal, but that's what it says. So, while wanting his congregation to hear, he was urging them on to believe what they had heard, follow what they had heard, trust what they had heard, and obey what they had heard.

That is what we are called to do. Standing alone, hearing is not enough. It's important, but it's not enough.
Remember, faith comes by hearing. But faith without works is a dead faith, and a dead faith will not save anyone. Book of James talks about that.
This leads me to say that there are many people who have an intellectual grasp of the doctrines of Scripture.
But all too often they fall short of applying those doctrines to daily moment-by-moment living.
[13:42] We need application. It is one thing to understand the doctrines of grace. It is entirely something else to live the doctrines of grace.

As an example, I'm quite certain that everyone in this church, certainly in this room, believes in the inerrancy of Scripture. Scripture. But not everyone in this church is living under the authority of Scripture.
And in our verses today, the writer will urge his congregation and by extension us centuries later to continue to be diligent and to be vigilant.
As we run the race that God has set before us, here are three things we should concentrate on. The first one is concentrate on continuance.
Continance is an important Bible word. In fact, the Bible says, he continues to the end and will be saved. So, we see how important that word is. But in Hebrews 12, 12-13, it says, therefore, lift your drooping hands.

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[15:18] If you've got drooping hands, lift them. Strengthen your weak knees. It's getting personal now. I've got that.

And make straight paths for your feet, so that what is lame may not be put out of joint, but rather be healed.
This, of course, is a metaphor for running a race. In running, arm position is extremely important. you use the arms to maintain balance, body coordination, rhythm.
I used to get my exercise when I was at Phillips, watching Oscar run. He'd come out of the gym and he'd go run. Next to go are the knees.
[16:19] If the runner focuses on these things, he's going to fail. The only way to finish the race is to focus on the goal. Have a goal. So carrying the metaphor forward, the writer tells us that when we experience spiritual hands, we are weak and knees that are feeble, we only have one main hope.

It's also in chapter 12, but in verse 2, fix our eyes on Jesus. Now there's some good advice. Fix your eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith.
the writer also says that we're to make straight paths for our feet. I surely must have the worst feet in the room.
I'm supposed to do a treadmill tomorrow and they won't let me because I have neuropathy, nerve damage. I can't even walk, much less run well.
what the writer here says makes straight paths for our feet. What is that about? When running the race, we have to stay in our lane.
[17:49] When you get out of your lane, some things are going to happen. A couple things are both bad. First, you disqualify yourself.

Second, you interfere with other runners. with these two things being true, why would a runner get out of his lane?
It's not necessarily intentional. I suppose it might be, but it's not. But it can happen for several reasons. The runner gets distracted.
The runner gets careless. The runner loses concentration on the goal. Fatigue sets in and robs the runner of the will to finish the race.
I'm sure I've told you this story when I was my senior year in high school. The coach got myself and another guy together. We were weight men. He threw a shot put, I threw a javelin.
[18:59] But we were pretty good runners, but we didn't do it competitively. And we were racing, the mile race was against the state champion. And our coach told us, Coach Martin, he said, I want you two to run in this race.

And I want you to go as far and as fast as you can go. Go until you drop. You're not going to win. Just go until you drop.
And the reason is this guy that you're going to race against, the state champion, he always wants to lead. There was just something in him. He wanted to be out front.
So when the gun sounded, we took off. And here he came. So we turned it up. And look behind him, he's coming again, so we turned it up.
I went about as far as I could. The other guy went as far as he could. The guy running the race for the other team set the state record that day.
[20:07] He beat us to death. There's an interesting word in all this. It's the word path. The Greek word troikia, referring to a track in those days, left by the wheels of a cart or a chariot.

In ancient days, this is what travelers followed. In other words, people before them created a path that was behind them.
And then people would come through. You could still see wagon train paths in the western United States. Others will follow that path and either be led by it or misled by it if it's the wrong path.
And that's why we should all take great care that we leave behind us straight paths. us. We do that only when we live right in the light of scripture and run a straight course.
And verse 13 has some interesting language, the second half of that verse, verse, so that the limb which is lame may not be put out of joint, but rather be healed.
[21:39] And that word lame has been subject to several interpretations over the years. In the context of the book of Hebrews, it is referring to those professing individuals who have identified themselves with the local church, but most of them lacked commitment to Christ and were in fact unsaved.

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And we studied those guys early on in this study. For all practical purposes, they appear to be in the race, but they're not.
They are very vulnerable to being out of their lane and tripping others as they try to run the race. Now, some will follow the path they blaze, unfortunately, the unsaved all the way to hell, and the scary thing is they have every appearance of being in the race.
Spectators say, he's a good runner, look at him, he's gone. He's in the race, but they're not in the race. They're not in the race. And lame could also take in some true believers, but they're not running the race very well.
[23:11] people. The sad truth is that sometimes Christians, true Christians, can be the greatest stumbling blocks to Christianity.

Bad examples can tilt seekers away from Christ and therefore away from salvation.
frightening. A poor testimony can be very harmful to the cause of Christ and can leave a seeker out of joint, meaning that they become dislocated spiritually from Christ.
This is why we're admonished, examine yourselves. 2 Corinthians. Examine yourselves. Make sure you're in the body.
Have you so run the race to have caused others to flee from the race? I believe Jesus is referring to this very thing in the Sermon on the Mount.
[24:22] He says this in Matthew 5 13-16 you are the salt of the earth. But if the salt has become tasteless, how can it be made salty again?

And the truth is it can't. It is no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trampled underfoot by men.
you're the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden, nor does anyone light a lamp and put it under a blanket, puts it on a lampstand.
And when that is done, it gives light to all who are in the house. Then the Holy Spirit says this, and Jesus says this, let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works and glorify your Father who is in heaven.
So we need to concentrate on the way we run the race that God has set before us. Another thing we need to do is pursue peace.
[25:50] peace. Hebrews 12, 14, pursue peace with all men. And in there, and the sanctification being made like Christ, being made holy, how important is that?

Without which no one will see the Lord. Pretty important. Can't see Jesus without sanctification.
And again, these verses have been subject of controversy over the generations. We have to be careful. We don't want to interpret this to mean a salvation by works.
Salvation is never obtained by works. we know that's an impossibility. It cannot be teaching unbelievers to achieve peace and sanctification without Christ.
It's reserved for believers, Christians. In fact, Solomon said there's no peace for the wicked. You search for peace, but you don't find it.
[27:09] peace and righteousness. The best theologians believe this passage is speaking about practical peace and righteousness.

Now, positionally, true believers have already attained peace and righteousness. in the eyes of God as believers, we're without sin.
How's that possible? Because the Father placed them upon His Son. He took our sins.
That's the whole meaning of propitiation in 1 John chapter 2. Christ is sinless.
We are in Him. Therefore, we are sinless positionally in Christ. But let's talk about practicality.
[28:27] I'm going to throw some water on this, okay? we still all have a distance to cover and much to do.

We strive so that our practice matches our position. How harmful is it for the unbeliever to rightly say that He really doesn't practice what He preaches.
So we're really called to do two things. And if we do these, by the way, let me say, everything else falls into place. Wouldn't that be nice?
I used to say it about the first world words in the Bible, in the beginning God. Get that down, everything falls into place. We're to do two things.
You do these, everything falls into place. What are we to do? Love men, love others. Got to be careful in our day. Love others, love God.

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[29:42] That is all part of the sanctification process. That we have love one for another. when we love each other and love God, the unsaved are drawn to us.

And if they're not drawn, they can never see the Lord except as His judge. And you don't want to see the Lord only as your judge.
And all of this is part of the believer growing into Christ-likeness, which is what sanctification is.
Third thing we should do, and that is be vigilant. Hebrews 12, 15. See to it that no one comes short of the grace of God, that no root of bitterness springing up causes trouble, and by it many be defiled.
See to it is one Greek word. We get the word overseer from that by the way. Overseers are those guys that watch over each other and watch over us and help us to grow into Christ-likeness.
[31:07] we are also to look out for those in the church who may not yet be believers.

Without judging them, we are to be sensitive in making sure they have come to Christ and been reborn. as many have said, the most fertile ground for evangelism is the church role.
And by the way, Billy Graham said that on many occasions. It's fertile ground, the role of the church.
We're to make sure that no one comes short of the grace of God.
And by the way, that's a command. And we also want to be on watch and protect the church from those that might cause bitterness.
Bitterness is a horrible sin. These are people superficially identified with Christ but who have made no true commitment to him.
[32:33] We must be on guard against such persons because they can cause great damage to the church. They corrupt the very body of Christ with their apostate beliefs and they spread apostasy.

Apostates are those exposed to the truth, considered the truth and then back away from the truth.
Jude talks about them. The writer gives another warning, our last one tonight, Hebrews chapter 12 verses 16 and 17, that there be no immoral or godless person like Esau.
Esau sold his birthright for some chili. I don't know how else to put it. A single meal.
He disinherited everything because he was hungry. For you know that even afterwards when he desired to inherit the blessing, he was rejected.
Why was he rejected? There was no room for repentance. He couldn't repent. He forfeited that. Though he sought it.
[34:11] he sought to repent with tears. And he couldn't do it. Perhaps the saddest two people in the Bible are Judas and Esau.

They do not appear to be the most evil persons described in the Bible, although they were evil. But they are in a category all by themselves.
They both had great light. They knew the way, but they turned their backs on the living God.
Esau was immoral and godless. He was a man of no faith. He had no ethics. He lived as a totally profane unbeliever his entire life.
And he is today, I'm convinced, crying out from the pit of hell, just give me one more chance. And of course, another chance never comes.
[35:28] It doesn't come. near the end of his life, he tried in some feeble way to repent, but it never happened.

He was sad, he regretted his life, but that's not repentance. He wanted the blessings of God, but only if he could have them on his terms.
And they never come to us that way. So brothers, if you're looking for that, it's not going to happen.
We must be on guard so that no one in the church turns from truth, becomes bitter, and follows after the way of Esau.
that's up to us to make sure that doesn't happen. Let's close with prayer. Thank you Father for the day, your grace, your mercy, and the peace we have with the Lord Jesus Christ.
May we honor him in all that we say, in all that we do. May we occupy till he comes, but may we be looking up. for our redemption draw at night.
[36:59] We thank you in Jesus' name. Amen.

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