

The Pursuit of Holiness (Part 9)

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[0:00] Hebrews chapter 12, and we've got a little ways to go in that chapter before we're going to be finished with it.

And that's alright, probably another couple of Wednesdays. We'll finish up this particular section tonight that I have kind of called Practical Holiness.

And so what I want to do is kind of bring us up to speed, and I've given you the next part of the outline for these verses, I think, from verse 12 through 17.

I've given you that part of the outline, but I didn't re-give you or re-issue what we've already looked at in this section. I just gave you where we're going to start up today. I kind of introduced this last point in this portion of the chapter.

Introduced that last week, and if you weren't here, I'm sorry. But you can hear it on our website if you'd like to do that. But, by way of review, let's start with verse 12, and I'll just quickly go through this and just highlight the main points, and then we'll take up with that fourth one. There are four points to be made here.

[1:29] Where Paul writes, therefore, strengthen the hands which hang down and the feeble knees. And so point one is strengthen your weak. This is an admonition to the church.

And again, I would emphasize, because the way it's written and worded here, the idea is that we're to strengthen the hands and the feeble knees of those around us.

That we ought to take that very seriously as members of the body of Christ. We're a family, and we need to help one another. And when those among us are having struggled spiritually, or maybe have even fallen into sin, whatever the case may be, we need to reach out and help and restore. And so, strengthen your weak. Verse 13, And make straight paths for your feet, so that what is lame, as the lame around you, may not be dislocated.

That's the New King James, kind of rather strange word. But anyway, may not be dislocated, but rather be healed. So the second point is strengthen your way. So strengthen your weak, the weak around us.

[2:49] And we always have some within the body, within the family, who are weak. We'll strengthen the weak. Sometimes I might be weak, and need you to strengthen me.

And we need to be alert to that. And then we need to straighten our way. Because there are those who are following you. And looking up to you.

And you don't want your life, your journey, the way you're going, to be a way that would lead others astray. So that's number two.

Number three comes in verse 14. Pursue peace with all people, and holiness, without which no one will see the Lord. And I call that sanctify your worship.

Because this is a part of our worship. The worship that extends beyond just what we have kind of categorized as worship. And then we'll get to the fourth point here in verse 15.

[3:43] Looking carefully, lest anyone fall short of the grace of God, lest any root of bitterness springing up cause trouble, and by this many become defiled, lest there be any fornicator, or profane person like Esau, who for one morsel of food sold his birthright.

For you know that afterward, when he wanted to inherit the blessing, he was rejected. For he found no place for repentance, though he sought it diligently with tears. Now the fourth point then is to share your wealth.

And I might again just remind you, we're not talking here about, or I'm not talking here about financial wealth. Sometimes God leads us to share that too in our tithes and our offerings.

And part of that's a commandment, and part of it is how God blesses us and leads us and directs us. So yeah, we do share some of our substance with one another, with those in need and so forth.

But the idea here is not the material wealth or physical wealth that God may have blessed you to have, but your greatest wealth and the thing you have that is of the greatest value is the grace of God.

[5:05] So our greatest wealth is, that's the first little bullet there, is the grace of God, of which we have been recipients.

And then the second bullet there, we are then, according to the instructions, that I understand, as I understand how this is worded and what Paul is expressing here, we are to see to it that no one comes short of the grace of God.

Comes short of it. To fail to get it. To come short of the grace of God. That's what he's saying, I believe, in the first few words there, and that kind of introduces this section of the text.

Looking carefully, lest anyone fall short. Now he's not saying lest you fall short. Y'all be careful about that too. The idea here is again looking outside of yourself to those within the assembly. The membership of the church. Looking out to make sure that no one in our fellowship fails to get God's grace.

[6:20] That's the idea here. Though we've got to go a lot deeper than that to understand exactly what he means. Because, and this is the third little bullet, we certainly need God's grace for everything every day.

So in a general sense, and I spent some time kind of defining this last time, we need grace for everything. So it's not just simply saving grace, but it's the ongoing work of grace or the gift of grace in our lives that comes to us from the Father.

And we need it for everything every single day. But, I believe Paul's focus here is not grace in that general sense or that ongoing sense of need that the believer has, but the focus is God's saving grace.

We're talking about salvation here. for those within the fellowship or within the confines of the local church body.

Because let's just admit it, not everyone in the fellowship or in the confines of this local church called Highland Park Baptist, there's not everyone who attends here every Sunday, maybe even comes to Sunday school, not every one of those are saved.

[7:48] Some are lost. Some have never been saved. And so here's the focus. And so the final bullet there is the context is the church membership.

So kind of putting that all together, I think Paul is indicating here that a failure to do this, that is a failure to do everything you can to see to it, that no one fails or comes short of God's saving grace. Failure to do that results in some very devastating consequences. But certainly not only for the individual, but for the church too.

Because the focus here is not so much the individual, though that's part of it, but the church as a whole. Not the church as a whole in the sense of the church worldwide or some sense of a universal church, but the local church.

That local church body. That's the focus here. That's the context here. And so, I'm going to share with you here, and there are four of them, there is a progression of consequences revealed in this text.

[9:03] And I think you'll see this. It's pretty clear to see, but I'm going to point it out to you all along the way. A progression of consequences from, all the way from initially, a failure by some within that local church, a failure by some to get God's grace, God's saving grace, all the way to out and out apostasy.

And that's the progression we're going to see, I think, in this text. So, first, where does it begin? It begins with unbelieving church members. Is that possible?

That someone could be on our church roll, maybe even active, maybe even in a place of leadership, and still be unregenerate, unsaved.

Is that possible in the church? It certainly is. And so, this is the focus. This is the context of Paul's argument here or his instructions here for us.

Unbelieving church members. Those who have, as he describes it here, or implies it here in the opening phrase of verse 15, who have come short or fall short of the grace of God.

[10:25] We're to be looking for them. Looking out for them. Not to expel them, but to do everything we can to make sure they get the gospel. Even if they're church members.

So it begins with unsaved church members. Not unsaved members of the church in the sense of the bride of Christ because the bride of Christ, they're the redeemed.

They're the regenerate. The born again believers. But in the church, the population of the church, there are those who are unsaved. Those in the church who have failed and are continuing to fail to respond to God's saving grace.

some of them, maybe their hearts are becoming tender toward the gospel. There may be some who are very close to the point of salvation.

Maybe they're just right there. And they have heard the gospel and they have embraced some of the truths of that gospel that yet have not repented and been saved. But they're close.

[11:39] There are those that are very near it. Maybe there are those who know what they're missing and what they need and what is demanded of them by a holy God that they repent and trust Christ.

There are those who are very close and yet not yet saved. Some come into the church that way. And they are into the church membership. That way, they're unsaved and they walk down an aisle and they fill out a card and maybe they come by transfer from another church and no one ever questions, never speaks with them, discusses with them about salvation.

They've come from another church or they come by some statement of faith and we just take them at the Word and they become members of the church that way. Alright?

And this is what happens and what has happened. And every church has people people like this in their congregation. They're unsaved.

Now, how does it happen? Well, the problem I think is that we mistakenly think that witnessing to church members or questioning prospective members about their conversion is somehow judging their hearts.

[13:02] that's kind of the first excuse we make. You know, the first feeling we have, well, I don't want to judge their hearts, we'll just take them at the Word. And so they fill out a card and I'm a member of such and such church, baptized down there at that church or in some other community and we never speak with them about it because we think that would be judgmental.

That's part of the problem, but I would say that if we really would admit it, the real problem. What is the real problem?

And the real problem is the reason we do not do this, do not make sure, just see to it that no one in the church fails to get God's grace.

The reason we don't do it is because we're afraid of offending them. To this end or in the context of this fear that if it's a church member, maybe they'll leave our church because they're offended.

That members might get mad and leave the church. Or prospective members might not join our church because we counsel with them and question them and desire from them a testimony of faith and share the gospel with them.

[14:25] They might get offended and say, well, I'm just going to join that church. They won't believe me. So we're afraid that they won't join our church and so our church won't grow and we just can't have that. So anybody who walks down the aisle would just come on.

We'll just take you at your word. And so the result is the church membership begins to be more and more populated with people who are false professors of faith in Christ.

Maybe they are purposefully deceptive and maybe they have joined the church and professed to be Christians because it's good for their business or good for their political aspirations.

I pastored a church in a county seat town in Arkansas and politics was a big deal in that little Arkansas town. And I had a number of government leaders, leaders in the community, ministry, and some of them were good strong godly people and strong believers and some of them, they were there usually attended around election time.

That was about the only time you'd ever see them. But their membership was there at the church, the First Baptist Church. That's how it happens. And so we're afraid, we mistakenly think we're either judging them or we're afraid of offending them and maybe they won't want to be a part of us or maybe they might leave and we don't want our membership to dwindle that way.

[16:07] So we don't want to offend them, but there could be no greater offense when you think about it than to let them go to hell while we remain silent. No offense, by the way, could be no greater offense toward God and to that individual.

If we would just be silent, that would be terrible. And so we're commanded to do whatever we can do to see to it that no one comes short of the grace of God. And if we fail to do that, then Paul says that there is something progressively worse that might happen.

And so, second, or B, not two, but B, there's the root of bitterness. The root of bitterness. And that's pretty much the way it's worded here.

Lest any root of bitterness springing up cause trouble and by this many are defiled. A root of bitterness.

Now, what is that? Well, it's interesting that we find the same word used in Acts 8.23. I think I gave you this reference. It's the story about Simon, Simon the magician.

[17:18] Or some refer to him as Simon Magus. Magus is the Greek word for magician. And so he was a magician, a sorcerer, as it's worded in some translations.

You might remember the story. Philip, the deacon, Philip was preaching and performing miracles in Samaria. And there was Simon there, this magician, who was able to perform a lot of tricks and quite a following.

And the Bible says there in Acts 8 that he saw the miracles that were being done. And if I might paraphrase it, he thought to himself, I need to add that to my repertoire of magic tricks.

That would be great and I could really increase my performance or my influence in this community.

And so he wanted that. And then the Bible says something very interesting in verse 13 of Acts 8.

It says that he believed. He believed and not only that, he was baptized. I think we can understand and we'll certainly understand it as you read on in the story that he didn't truly believe.

[18:29] but he made a profession of faith like many have in the church since. It was not a true profession of faith.

It was no real faith. It was an intellectual decision on his part and you can't necessarily say that he was trying to be deceptive but I think it's pretty clear that he was.

but he wasn't interested in Christ. He was just interested in the miracles. That's how the story goes because later on when the apostles came and they laid hands on some of the believers, the new converts, and the Holy Spirit was given to them and the Bible says Simon was so impressed by that that he asked if he could buy that gift.

Remember? Remember? And this is what it says in verse 18 or starting with verse 18 of chapter 8. It says, and when Simon saw that through the laying on of the hands, the apostles' hands, the Holy Spirit was given, he offered them money, saying, give me this power also that anyone on whom I lay hands may receive the Holy Spirit.

So you can get a window into his heart there. But Peter said to him, your money perish with you. I love it. Just thought of what this probably was like.

[19:18] See Peter, you know, face to face. Let your money perish with you because you thought that the gift of God could be purchased with money. You have neither part nor portion in this matter, for your heart is not right in the sight of God.

That's how we know he was not saved. Not truly converted. Repent, but yet Peter still gives him the gospel. Repent, therefore, of your wickedness and pray, God, if perhaps the thought of your heart may be forgiven you.

For I see that you are poisoned by bitterness, by bitterness, and bound by iniquity.

Same word used there in Acts chapter 8, verse 23. So what's the point? I think Paul's making the same point in Hebrews chapter 12, verse 15.

When he says, see to it that no one in your church, no one who's walked that aisle, no one who's signed on that card, no one who's been entered into your church role, your church membership, see to it that no one who's worshiping with you every Sunday and attending your Sunday school class and other ministries, see to it that they do not fail to get God's saving grace.

[21:17] lest a Simon Magus springs up among you to cause you trouble. That's the idea here.

And so there are those who claim to have a relationship with Christ, but who are either outright deceptive for their own special motivations, similar to Simon, but there are other motivations, or they are self-deceived, self-deceived.

And maybe, you know, these people have believed certain facts about Jesus, but they've never really been saved. Another similar problem was highlighted in Deuteronomy.

Moses is, or God is speaking to Moses here. In Deuteronomy chapter 29, let me just read verse 18. Well, in verse 14, he says, I make this covenant and this oath, not with you alone, but with him who

stands here with us today before the Lord our God.

So he's made this covenant, and there are several reasons why. So that there may, verse 18, so that there may not be among you man or woman or family or tribe whose heart turns away today from the Lord our God to go and serve the gods of these nations, and that there may not be among you a root bearing bitterness or wormwood.

[22 : 36] And so it may not happen when he hears the words of this curse, the curse of those who break this covenant, that he blesses himself. Now this is important to get the wording here, that he blesses himself in his heart saying, I shall have peace, translation, peace with God, even though I follow the dictates of my heart, my own heart, as though the drunkard could be included with the sober.

We're talking about a false follower, a false believer, who says, I have peace, but he says it to himself. I have the peace, and yet my heart is still directed by my own desires, my own rule, rather than directed by the Lord.

And so, you know, I think it's safe to say, sad to say, that there are some in the church today who are not saved. And not just unsaved, but some in the church, there's the potential for there to be, like a Simon, in the church, living, acting, speaking, ungodly, because it reaches that point eventually, like any unregenerate person would live.

And so, these examples, like Simon, and like this general example out of Deuteronomy, describe some in the church today, they speak religious words as if somehow they're magical.

You know, just speaking them makes things so. And they do religious things in the context of the church, as if that was going to bring them, you know, God's grace, God's good graces.

[24 : 29] But they're self-deceived. Self-deceived, like those in Moses' day, he blesses himself in his heart, saying, I have peace. I will have peace, even though my heart is not right with God.

Literally, is what he's saying. And that could never be. So, it's a serious thing, I think, to have in the church those who are self-deceived and thinking they're saved when they're not really saved, and then becoming a bitter, poisonous root within the body of Christ, which leads to a third consequence, progressively worse consequence.

It leads to trouble and defilement in the church. He says in verse 15, the last phrase of the verse, he says, lest any root of bitterness spring up cause you trouble, and by this many become defiled.

Trouble and defilement. Now, you know, obviously, some false professors who might come into the church and join the church, some of those will eventually fall away from the church and they're never heard from again.

That happens quite often. In fact, most church roles are full of people like that, quite honestly. We call them inactive members. Really, many of them are probably just not saved.

[25 : 53] And they just fall away on their own. But there are some, and this is the warning that we get from Scripture here, there are some who are in a root of bitterness and they stay within the church contaminating the body and corrupting others who are in the church.

So they stay in the church and sometimes they'll spread wickedness in the church, believe and teach heresy in the church. I mean, that's happened many times in the church.

So discord, that's probably more common to see in the church, to have those in the church who sow discord and just cause trouble in general.

And Paul says, by this, many become defiled. Now this is, you know, the horror of this is in the language Paul uses.

The word many here, just that little word many in the text, carries the idea of the majority. Here's the warning, and here's the potential danger of not seeing to it that your membership is made up of born-again believers.

[27 : 11] believers. And when God identifies one or presses upon your heart that maybe this one or that one is not truly saved, that we ought to give them the gospel.

Pray for them. Here's the potential danger that it could lead to the majority of the church being defiled.

That's diabolical. That one person who has fallen short of the grace of God, comes short of the grace of God, he's unregenerate, can become a poisonous root in the church that not only, well, that springs up, he says, and this is a interesting image, it really describes someone who raises to a place of influence in the church, even becoming a leader in the church, or at the very least having some kind of voice in the church, influence in some way.

So, here's this poisonous root in the church, unregenerate member of the church, who is raised up to a place of leadership, and then is responsible for corrupting and defiling potentially the majority of the congregation.

Does that happen every time? Of course not. But here's the warning that Paul is giving, and maybe we might even say the worst case scenario that could potentially happen.

[28:48] And it has happened in churches. Churches have blown apart because of this very thing. Jesus said, a little leaven, leaveneth the whole lump. Now, who is really responsible for this happening in the church?

Is it Satan? No, not really. Now, he's certainly involved in it. I'm not ruling out any influence Satan would have.

He'd like nothing better than to destroy the local church. But in terms of who's responsible, I am. And you are.

by the way, every true believer in the church is responsible for something like this taking place within the church body.

So, we are the ones, Paul says, who are responsible to see to it that no one among us fails to get God's saving grace. I've kind of wondered in horror really, you know, how many unregenerate souls that I might have been responsible for adding to the church because I just assumed they were saved.

[30:10] I take that more seriously the older I get and the longer I'm in the ministry. And when someone walks down that aisle on Sunday morning and I say, are you born again Christian?

Yes. and just take that as word I think that's why it's important that we take them aside and share the gospel and find out where they are spiritually.

And I wonder, you know, maybe I've assumed over the years some of the churches I've pastored and I wonder how many times I have felt in my spirit that maybe a certain member in my church was not saved, not truly saved, and I didn't pray for him or her.

I didn't share the gospel with that person because I just assumed they were saved or I didn't want to offend them. I mean, there is that temptation, that pressure upon your life not to offend anybody. They're already a member of the church as it is in the sense of their names on the roll and, you know, I may have my doubts, but I might offend them if I really came to them privately and just spoke with them about spiritual things.

[31:26] And I wonder about that and how many, you know, I've observed in my ministry as a pastor whose heart seemed to be kind of sensitive to going through something spiritually in their lives and I didn't read that properly as really someone who God is bringing to a point of sensitivity toward the gospel.

I assumed they were already saved and so maybe it's something else spiritually. Instead of probing and trying to discover where they really are spiritually, I've assumed salvation and focused on something else when really the problem was they just needed to be saved.

And we just sometimes assume that. And I've also thought about the times that I've visited someone in the hospital. And there'd be other family members there in that hospital room and not take the opportunity to share the gospel with even the quote, member who's in that hospital bed because I just didn't want to offend or just assume that they were saved.

and the times maybe and all of us ought to be open to the voice of God in regard to this, the times that we have disobeyed the prompting of the Holy Spirit to ask that one.

You know, ask, are you saved? You know, yeah, she or he's a church member, but sometimes God leads us to maybe have some insight into what's going on in their life.

[33:17] And maybe God is pressing upon my heart or your heart to speak with them and to make sure about that. See, that's the idea. Not that we can make them be recipients of God's saving grace.

That's not the point. But everything we should do, we should make sure that those who are a part of our fellowship are born-again believers, that they don't come short of God's saving grace.

And then, you know, I kind of add all those together, all those kind of scenarios and possibilities where I might have failed or might have come up short or might have even disobeyed the prompting of God and people have been added to the church and I wonder how many of those people in those churches I've pastored are now bitter, poisonous roots in that church, those churches, and troubling the church and defiling others within the church.

See, we need to make sure about these things. Not rooting people out and expelling them because, well, you said you were a believer and you're not and so you don't have any part.

Not treating them in that way, but loving them and praying for them and making sure that we ask them personally, have you ever truly repented of sin and trusted Christ as your Lord and Savior?

[34:39] faith. So, it's very important. And it may include, it would certainly extend to those that are maybe part of your Sunday school class.

And maybe you work with younger people and need to pay close attention to that and take every opportunity to introduce them to the gospel and keep that at the forefront of your ministry and speaking with them personally about their profession of faith.

We have a responsibility. If we kind of lump all these together, not only today, but in the passages that precede this verse, we have a responsibility to lift up those whose hands are hanging down and are feeble.

We have a responsibility to other believers in our body who need help, need encouragement. We have a responsibility to make sure that our paths are straight so that the weaker ones around us, so that they won't be turned out of the way.

The Bible says we can go the wrong way. We have a responsibility to follow peace with all men and all people and follow holiness with God. And then, with this one, we have the responsibility to see to it, to do everything within our power to make sure no one among us fails to get God's saving grace.

[35:59] But now, Paul's not finished yet. Verses 16 and 17. What time is it? I've got just about enough time. All the time. All the time.

Alright, verse 16 and 17. Kind of cap this off. There's one more thing, progressively worse. Lest there be any fornicator or profane person like Esau, who for one morsel of food sold his birthright. For you know that afterward when he wanted to inherit the blessing, he was rejected for he found no place for repentance, though he sought it diligently with tears.

Now, what is the idea here? The ultimate, we might say the ultimate consequence for the church, and particularly for those in that body who are not true believers, the ultimate consequence is an immoral and profane life, according to Paul.

And I think what we're to understand here is that there are those, I mean, those who become poisonous roots in the church, the roots of bitterness, who trouble and defile the church body, many of them, ultimately all of them, will also embrace some form of moral impurity.

[37:32] That's the natural, progressive result of those who profess Christ but they're not true professors, and they become roots of bitterness poisoning the church, and they cause trouble and defilement and lead others astray, and they themselves fall deeper into an immoral life.

Fornication, he says, and that's just kind of a general word that includes all sexual impurity. But as bad as that is, it's worse than that, and that is a profane life.

Not just an immoral life, but a profane life, or a godless life. So, here's a man or woman or a group of people within the church who have been exposed to the light of the gospel.

They have had every opportunity to repent and turn to Christ and follow Him. They know the word of God because they have sat under its teachings and have heard the promises of God.

They have seen the work of God in their midst. They've witnessed this. They have fellowship with God's people, and yet this person willfully turns his back or her back on God and the things of God, the gospel, and they become apostates.

[39:05] And here's the horror. They can actually reach a point, this is how we understand this from Esau, they can actually reach a point where, like Esau, they find no place for repentance.

They've crossed some line where now there's no possibility of repentance. Now, I don't know where that line is, or when that happens, or who's crossed it, but Paul says this is the ultimate end of it, apostasy.

And Paul gives us, I think, this horrifying reality about apostasy, and I'll end with this. Back in Hebrews 10 and verse 26, a frightening passage really, very frightening.

For if we sin willfully, the idea of there being habitual sin, or really the idea is habitual rejection of the gospel, after we have received the knowledge of the truth, that's the gospel.

So if we willfully, habitually, reject the gospel, the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins.

[40:25] Because there's only one sacrifice for sin, and it's the blood of Jesus. and to willfully stand and reject that, there reaches a point where there's no possibility of salvation.

It's really very frightening. But rather than that, a fearful expectation of judgment and fiery indignation, which will devour the adversaries.

I think he adds there that there's an even greater condemnation for those who willfully reject the gospel. And I'm not talking about pagans and people out here.

We're talking about people who are exposed to the gospel of Jesus Christ. People inside, even inside a church like this one, a Bible believing, Bible preaching church like Highland Park Baptist Church, and can sit there and hear that gospel and willfully reject it.

There remains no more sacrifice for them. It's frightening. Frightening. And that's apostasy. And what Paul is saying is that we have a responsibility as true believers to make sure, make sure, as much as we can, as much as we're able, as we follow the Lord and as He gives us opportunities and connections and we're to make sure that every, quote, member of Highland Park Baptist Church is a born again believer.

[42:08] We're to make sure about that before they ever join the church as much as we can. We can't see the hidden parts of the heart, but as God gives us understanding and the things that we need to do, make sure that no one joins His church who's not saved.

And then, from then on, to make sure that we're alert to the reality. And maybe there are some in our body who are struggling because they're not really saved. And not condemning them and ostracizing them or treating them differently and standoffish, but loving them and going to them as we have opportunity and share the love of Jesus with them.

Plead with them to repent, trust Christ. That's, I believe, what Paul is talking about here. Or whoever wrote Hebrews. Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

Thank you.