

Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

Falling Short of the Grace of God

Scripture: Hebrews 12:12-17

Code: 1637

Hebrews chapter 12 is our study tonight, and we've been studying in the Book of Hebrews for, oh, I suppose about 40 messages and having a wonderful time; and I almost hate to get to the end; and yet the end is coming; and we know God has something else in store for us in days ahead; but we come to chapter 12 and verses 12 through 17 as the setting for what we wanna discuss tonight.

We've entitled the message, "Falling Short of the Grace of God." Lemme begin by saying this. Scripture is not just doctrine; and we make a great emphasis on the fact of doctrine here at Grace Church that it's very important that you really know what the Word of God teaches, that doctrine is basic to everything. Paul said to Timothy, "Give heed to doctrine." Paul repeated again and again in the...in the pastoral epistles the importance of sound doctrine; and, yet, doctrine isn't all there is in Christianity by any means. There is also ethics or the living out of doctrine. There is not only the static didactic information, but there is the life that follows, living action; and the two always go together. In fact, they're designed together.

The Apostle Paul said to Timothy in 1 Timothy 6:2, he said this, "These things teach and exhort." It isn't quite enough to just dispense the information unless you exhort the people to make it practical and operative in their lives. In fact, he repeated later to Timothy these words, "Read the text, explain the text, and apply the text." That's what a preacher is to do; and the term for applying the text is exhort. It's not just a question of giving you information, but it's a question of exhorting you.

I'll never forget preaching one time at Wheaton College to the student body, which is an awesome thing in itself, and all of that well-known faculty sitting there staring at you; and I was just a little outta seminary guy, and there I was facing 4,000 people in the great Edmund Chapel; and I began to speak; and, of course, I just get lost in what I'm saying anyway; and I was having a great time, and I was exhorting them to be committed to Christ, and I was going along through 2 Corinthians chapter 5 having a tremendous time, excited and all this stuff. And I got all done, you know, and I...I just kind of went away to think about what I'd said, and a student came to me and handed me a letter, a note that some student had written me. And this is what it said. "Dear Mr. MacArthur, I don't think you knew where you were today. This is Wheaton College. We don't need your type of speaking. Just give us the facts, and then you can sit down, and we'll take it from there."

Now if you wanna see how to get your ego deflated fast, that is it; and, you know, I thought about that. And then I thought about what the Bible says: teach and exhort, and I felt secure. And so I

wrote a note back to him. "Dear Friend, Thank you for helping me examine my ministry and be confirmed in the fact that I am following a pattern established in the Scripture. Yours truly." I really believe exhortation is part of what it's all about; and so tonight I'm not gonna teach you nearly so much as I'm gonna exhort you. So get ready.

The word for exhortation in the Bible is parakaleo. Means to call on or to beseech, to urge somebody to some kind of action; and that's part of it. In fact, the whole Book of Hebrews is that. Verse 22, "I beseech you, brother...in chapter 13...I beseech, brother, bear with the word of exhortation." Thirteen chapters of exhortation, but not just independent exhortation. Exhortation based on doctrine as all good exhortation is. Both teaching and exhortation are necessary. They are, in fact, inseparable. God's method for instruction is simple. It is this: set before the individual the moral and spiritual principles, and then show him how to apply himself to those principles. And even a step beyond that, if I may, motivate him to want to apply those principles. So it's information, then how to apply it, then motivate him to apply it.

So the teaching of the Word of God is not just knowledge. It is knowledge that is practical and then it's knowledge that is motivated. You know, there are a lotta people who have an intellectual grasp of the doctrines of the Scriptures, but they really don't know anything about the practical life. Somebody said they understand the doctrines of grace, but they don't experience the grace in those doctrines, because they never know how to implement them. It is one thing to believe, for example, in the Scripture. It is to believe that it's inspired and inerrant. It's something else to live under the authority of the Scripture with joy. It is one thing, for example, to believe Jesus Christ is Lord. It is quite another to surrender to His Lordship and enjoy it. It is one thing for me to believe God is omnipotent. It is another thing in midst of trial to learn how to lean on His mighty arm.

So there is information and then there is exhortation. You see, beloved, that's what explains the therefores and the wherefores in the New Testament. The therefores and the wherefores are there to say, "In view of the doctrine I've just told you, therefore do this." Or, "On the basis of what I've just said, wherefore here is your behavior." The therefores and the wherefores are the changes or the transitions into action from information.

You have it in Galatians. Paul goes through Galatians, and he says, "You're free from the law. You're free from the law. You're free from the law," and he gives all of the information. Then he says in chapter 5, "Therefore let us stand fast in the liberty wherewith Christ has made us free and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage." The therefore makes the transition. Eleven chapters of doctrine in Romans. Eleven chapters, and you haven't done anything. Eleven chapter of who you are, and finally he says, "Now, I beseech, therefore, brethren, on the basis of all the mercies of God I've given you for eleven chapters, present your bodies," and he moves into the practical, and it never does come in a vacuum. It always comes following doctrine. The Apostle Paul says, "We have victory over death." Remember it in 1 Corinthians 15? "We have victory over death," he says,

'Therefore be steadfast, unmovable.'...Paul says, "Jesus is coming. Wherefore comfort one another with those words." There's always that transition into action.

Now, as we come to the Book of Hebrews, we have come in chapter 12 to the wherefores and the therefores. Now, there have been a few therefores and wherefores scattered in prior, but this is kinda the whole wherefore/therefore section; and it kinda closes out with just one practical exhortation after another right on out to the end of the 13th chapter. Now, he's been exhorting these Jewish believers to come all the way committed to Christ, sink everything they've got into Christianity, and let go of all of the Judaistic things. You see, for eleven chapters, he said, "There is a new covenant that is a better covenant based on better promises with a better Priest who made a better sacrifice," and he points out the complete superiority of the new covenant in the first eleven chapters. He then says, "Wherefore, get in the race and run it with endurance and don't cop out. Don't run outta gas. Give everything you've got to Christ. That's all you need. He is sufficient."

Dr. Barnhouse used to say, "Hebrews was written to the Hebrews to tell the Hebrews they were no longer to be Hebrews."...Hebrews was written to exhort them to go all the way to Christ, and you remember what happened. You see, when they made a profession of faith in Christ, and they established a little community of Jewish believers, they begin to be persecuted by their Jewish friends, and they begin to miss the temple, and they begin to miss the priesthood, and they begin to miss all of the things that were so much a part of their life. And they were trying to do...to just give their undivided attention to Christ, but there was persecution, and there was problems, and there was hassles, and their family was cutting them off, and their friends were turning them out, and there were real problems, and all of a sudden things were happening that didn't look too good. And they begun to kinda fall back, like they were gonna go back to Judaism.

Sprinkled among these believing Jews were some who hadn't even yet been saved, and they had identified superficially as professing Christians with this Jewish community of believers, and they were there in name only, not in truth. And they were in danger of turning around and going back to apostate, to be apostates, to apostatize, if you want the verb. They were in danger of saying, "Oh, this is ridiculous. I've seen enough of this. I'm going back to Judaism," and had they done that, they would've been locked in unbelief forever, because they would've rejected against full information, and that's what apostasy is.

And so, really, he's talking to two. He's talking to the Christians who are in danger of holding onto Judaism, and he's saying, "Let go of that stuff. Christianity is everything you need. Let go of it. Come on. Get in the race and run with endurance. Take what comes." Then he's also saying to the guy who's come all the way, and he's intellectually convinced Christianity's true, but he's never made a personal commitment. He's never made Christianity personal. He's like a lotta people in church, probably a lotta people maybe in this church. Some surely here tonight who understand Christianity. It's in their head. They see what it is, but they've never made it personal, and they're in danger of

turning around and going back to Judaism and apostatizing, and he says, "Don't do that. Come on to Christ." And the, "Therefore, come on," is based on the new covenant, how glorious it is. "Because of all the new covenant is, come on. Don't turn your back on such a fantastic thing as the new covenant in Jesus Christ."

Now, as we come to verse 12 of chapter 12, he is gonna give three exhortations. Now watch carefully what I say to you now. These three exhortations are given to believers, to the true believers; but they have very great significance also to those intellectually convinced, externally identified, who have never made it personal. It is spoken to the believers, but it has in view these others as we shall see when we look at it.

On the basis, now, watch it, on the basis of all the sound doctrine, on the basis of the fact that you oughta get in the race and run, and you shouldn't quit, but run with endurance; on the basis of the fact that all the trouble you have is only the disciplining hand of a loving Father; on the basis that everything in your life is being done under the control of God to bring about the best for you, he says, "Here's three things I want out of you: continuance, diligence, and vigilance." Those three.

On the basis that this new covenant is absolutely all you need, on the basis that even your trouble is allowed by God as discipline to perfect you, on the basis that God is doing everything in your life for a positive result, what were the twofold results? Life and holiness we saw last week. "On the basis that everything is working to your good, here's what I want you to do. Three things, continuance, diligence, vigilance." These are the three...

He just said in verse 4 to 11, "I know you've got problems. Sure, it isn't easy identifying with Christianity. Sure, you get a lotta flack. That's the way it is." As Paul said to Timothy, "All that will live godly in this present age will suffer persecution. We know that. You come out for Jesus Christ, and somebody's gonna be upset, especially if you happen to be Jewish," and living in the 1st century even made it worse. Sure, you've had it tough, but just keep in mind this is God's marvelous, loving discipline, and on the...on the basis of the fact that the new covenant is so good and so complete, and that all the best that you have is from God, and all the worst that you're having, God is using to mold you, what's the first word of verse 12? What is it? Wherefore.

On the basis of everything that I've told you, wherefore, I want three things: continuance, diligence, vigilance. Now, he just said, "You're gonna have problems, sure; but those problems are nothing to worry about. You are to be exercised by them." In other words, when you see weights in your way, pick 'em up and work with 'em. They build spiritual muscle. Don't collapse. When you're running in the race and you see a hurdle, don't fall over. Hurdle it. It's meant to stretch you, to strengthen you, to exercise you. On the basis that everything so far before this point has been for your benefit and your good, I want three things.

Let's look at the first one - continuance, verses 12 and 13. He says, "I want you to continue. Wherefore, lift up the hands which hang down and the feeble knees, and make straight paths for your feet, lest that which is lame be turned out of the way, but let it rather be healed." Now, the first thing he says is this. "Don't get tired in the race." He goes back to his race metaphor. "Don't get weary."

Christians, you know, have found the fountain of youth. Did you know that? I went down one time to the World Church down there in Los Angeles where, what's that name, Ms. Velma is, and I heard they were having the anointing of the oil of youth. I think I told you about that, and I decided I'd get it, and so I was the first one down there when they asked, "For those who like to come and stand upon the holy altar and get the anointing of the oil of youth," and I got it, and it doesn't work...but I'll tell you one thing. Being a Christian enabled me to find the fountain of youth. You say, "What do you mean by that?" Well, I just simply mean what Paul said in 2 Corinthians 4:16, which is a tremendous promise. Listen to this. "For which cause we faint not, but though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day." Isn't that good?

Do you know the outward man is perishing? If you don't think so, just look around. There's a whole bunch of perishing going on around here tonight. Every one of us, but you remember, remember Luis Pallow's statement that, "Even though people get old on the outside, sometimes the youngest people you meet are the oldest physically, but they've had to the most years of being renewed every day in the Spirit of God." That's right. We've found the fountain of youth, and that's exactly what the writer of Hebrews is saying here. He's saying, "Look, there's no reason to run outta gas now. You're renewed every day. Lift up your hanging arms. Pump those feeble knees." What he's really saying in athletic metaphor is, "Get your second wind."...Sure the outward man is perishing, but what did Isaiah say? "But they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their...what?...their strength. They shall mount up with wings like eagles. They shall run and not be weary. They shall walk and not faint." That's the promise of God.

Well, these poor Hebrew Christian had become tired and weary and listless. Oh, they were under the persecution. You ever meet a Christian like that? Ohhhhh, you know, everything is such a disaster. Completely run outta gas, and instead of taking the weights in front of them and lifting them up and building their muscles, they were collapsing at the very sight of them. Instead of hurdling the hurdles and building strength, they were falling apart at the face of...and looking in the face of any kind of obstacle at all. They were collapsing, and the whole...the whole community of believers begun to really suffer from it.

Back in chapter 10 verse 31 and 32 it says that attendance was falling off. Verse 24 and 25, I'm sorry. "And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together as the manner of some is, but exhorting one another." So it was taking its toll. They began to really kinda peter out, and they were drifting back toward Judaism, so

that they weren't quite attending as faithfully as they used to. It was having, really, a very negative affect, and I think that some of the believers began to wonder if they were in the right race at all, and some of the intellectually convinced professing believers who weren't really saved were wondering whether they wanted to get in this race after all. And they were both hankering backwards to thinking in their minds, "Maybe the old covenant was where it was at all the time, and we blew it." And so they needed to be exhorted to continue.

Sure it's not always easy. That's no...that's no reason to turn around and go back. Sure it's not easy. So verse 12 simply says this, "Wherefore, lift up the hands which hang down and the feeble knees." Do you know that discipline, and we've seen it in verses 4 to 11, discipline isn't designed to slow us down. It's designed to speed us up. You know, if you're an athlete, and you're gonna train for a track meet, you're gonna discipline yourself or you're not gonna be any good in the track meet. Can you imagine a guy coming out to run a mile who's never worked out?...You see, the discipline isn't meant to slow him down. The discipline is made...meant to speed him up. It's meant to make him faster in the race, and God brings things into our lives in order that He might speed us, not slow us down.

You know, in any kind of a race, you can always tell when a guy gets tired. I ran enough track to know this, and you can always tell. Two things automatically happen. I know this from my...I'm telling you, personal experience. This has happened to me many, many times. The first thing that happens to a good runner when he gets tired is his arms drop. One of the first things you learn in running is the motion of your arms is very important, very strategic to the movement of your body, and the rhythm is all...all needs to be in...in congruity. Has to be going together; and you can always tell when a guy gets tired, because his arms start dropping, and that breaks his rhythm. You see, your arms are powerful enough to pull you into your stride, and any good runner works very diligently on the motion of his arms. And as he gets tired, his arms begin to drop, and then he begins to lose the drive.

Second thing that always happens to a runner when he gets tired is his knees begin to wobble. Now, any of you guys ever run track, you know this. You know what it's like to say, "Go, leg, go," and it doesn't, right? And your knees are just going like this. Well, I can...I can remember so many times running a 440 and coming around to the 380 mark with 60 yards to go, and saying, "Go, knees, go," and they just...you...you just have go, "Hmmmmm," like this and just put one out in front of the other, almost forcing each leg individually. And so this is a very graphic illustration that he has here. The arms begin to droop. The rhythm is lost, and pretty soon he's fighting against the growing numbness in his legs. You know what happens then? If he begins to concentrate on the numbness in his legs, he's finished. There's only one thing that a runner can do at that point, and that is to look at the goal line. To look at that goal line and tell himself, "I am gonna make that goal line." That's the only thing he can do.

So it is with a Christian. There may come times in the Christian life when your arms begin to droop and your knees begin to wobble, and you don't know if you can get one in front of the other one again. Well, you don't look at your wobbly knees, and you don't start looking at your drooping arms. You just look at that finish line. And better than any guy who ever ran a race, you have the absolute guaranteed condition that you're gonna be the victor, and with that in the back of your mind, you fire on.

Now, like so many illustrations in the Book of Hebrews, this was taken from the Old Testament, Isaiah 35. Lemme show you what it says there. It's a great definition of this very issue. Isaiah 35 verse 1, wonderful promise of victory for Israel. Get this one. "The wilderness and the solitary place shall be glad for them; and the desert shall rejoice and blossom like a rose." Now, this is a kingdom chapter. Isaiah is saying, "Oh, Israel, you're gonna have a kingdom. Boy, Messiah's gonna come, and you're gonna have a kingdom, and the desert's gonna blossom like a rose. It shall blossom abundantly, and rejoice even with joy and singing. The glory of Lebanon shall be given unto it, the excellency of Carmel and Sharon; they shall see the glory of the Lord, and the excellency of our God."

Old Isaiah sees a whole lotta discouraged children of Israel. They are down in the mouth, pouting, troubled, and he says, "Hey, perk up, everybody, the kingdom's coming. The desert will blossom like a rose. The glory of God will manifest itself. Great days are coming, people." Terrific. What does he say in verse 3? "Strengthen the weak hands and confirm the feeble knees." That's where the writer of Hebrews got it. "Come on. Pick it back up again. Let's go. There's victory ahead."

Verse 4, "Say to those who are of a fearful heart, 'Be strong, fear not. Behold, your God will come with vengeance, even God with a recompense; He'll come and save you.' Hey, the day is coming." You know, that's so...I can relate that. So can you as a Christian. We look in the Bible, and we see that so often, don't we? You come to church and somehow get up here and I preach on the Second Coming, and "Hey, the Lord's coming," and we get all excited. You walk out, and you think, "Oh, I gotta do the wash tomorrow. My foot hurts. My ulcer's acting up. Ahhhhh." You know, and it's all sort of pie in the sky stuff; and, pretty soon, you aren't 15 minutes away from here, and your knees are wobbling, and your arms have drooped again, and you're back in the same, old listless rut.

We can relate to that, and he says, "Just get your eyes off the routine and get it on the fact that God will come. God's promise will come to pass." And I like another thought that's in verse 12.

"Wherefore, lift up the hands which hang down and the feeble knees." Notice it doesn't say your hands. It says the hands, and that implies something else to me. That implies that you're not only to lift your own hands up, but you're to go around finding other drooping, wobbly-kneed characters and help strengthen them. That's part of the life of the body, isn't it? Isn't that what he said back there in chapter 10 verse 25? Sure he did. "Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together." Why? Verse 24, "Let us consider one another to provoke unto love and good works." We're in the business, not only of getting our own knees going and our own arms pumping, but setting an example to others

and lifting them up and getting them going in the race...He says, "Come on. Don't quit. Don't run outta gas now. What I want is continuance. Let the discipline of God speed you, not slow you down. Let everything that God brings into your life not be a deterrent, but just new energy."

Verse 13 takes it a step further. "And make straight paths for your feet." You know what that means? Stay in your own lane...It's really disastrous when you see some guys running down the track and people start changing lanes. "Stay in your own lane," is what he's saying. "Make a straight path for your feet." So many believers are running the race, but on each side of the race, you know, there's the world with all of its little trinkets, and here's the world, and the believer's going, "Mmmmmmm-mmmmm-mmmmm." See? Running from side to side just to kinda entertain himself by looking at what the world's doing; and the world is alluring along the track, and the believer's wobbling; and all the time you're wobbling back and forth, you're running across other Christians...

That's something of what the Apostle Paul is talking about in Romans 14 when he says, "Watch how you live, because you might make your brother stumble over you." If you don't run the race in your own lane, straight ahead at full speed, you're gonna trip somebody. And Christians, so often, this is true, isn't it? When we say, "What I sin, it's only my business." No, it's not. When you fall, somebody's watching.

Always think of the story my dad used to tell about the father who went out to get drunk again, and he was walking through the snow to the bar, and he hadn't gone very far from his house, and he thought something was following him. He turned around, and here was his little boy, six years old, stretching as far as he could to make sure he put his feet in his dad's footsteps in the snow; and his dad said, "Where are you going?" He says, "I'm just following your footsteps, Dad."...And, as the story goes, his dad went home and broke down and cried, and some, through some other instrumentation, God sent somebody, and that man became saved and later told that story.

Well, you know, somebody's walking along just putting their feet right in the spots you've made; and if you're wobbling around knocking into everybody's lane, you're gonna mess up a lotta Christians. Make your path straight. Stay in your own lane. Run a smooth, clear, straight path. The Greek word here is a...is a smooth, straight path. Now there's a...this, again, is an Old Testament concept. I'm thinking it's Proverbs 4. I might be wrong, 25, yes, "Let thine eyes look right on." That's good. You didn't know that was in the Bible, did you?... "Let thine eyes look right on, and let thine eyelids look straight ahead, straight before thee onto the path of thy feet and let all thy ways be established. Turn not to the right hand nor to the left. Remove thy foot from evil." Make a straight path, and go. Don't wander from side to side looking over the edge, seeing what the world's doing. You're gonna mess up some other Christians.

I like the term that is used here for paths, troik... troikeahin the Greek, and it means the...the track left by wheels. You know, the cart would go down in a straight line. It would leave tracks, and the point

is that you're not only running, you're leaving a track. Isn't that a beautiful thing? You're leaving a pattern for somebody to follow, and there's somewhere back there Christians who are either going like this after your life or like this, see. Knocking over other Christians while they follow you...And so continuance, beloved, isn't just for your sake. It's for whoever's looking at you. It's so that you can provoke each other to love and good works that you're to run a straight path. It affects other people.

Now, he gives some lests here. In fact, he gives three of 'em in a row. "You oughta run straight," he says, and it's obviously an important thing to run straight; but he says very simply this, verse 13, "Lest that which is lame be turned out of the way." You say, "What do you mean there?" Well, the other two lests that appear in this text both have reference to professing Christians who aren't really Christians at all. One of 'em is the definition there of Esau. The other one is the one with the root of bitterness; and both of those have reference, not to Christians, but to professing Christians. People who claim to believe or who intellectually accept Christianity, but have never really given their hearts to Jesus Christ. And so if the other two lests fit them, it seems to me most fair in the treatment of the text to make this lest refer to that unbeliever as well. This is a man or a woman who knows the truth, who is sort of watching Christianity, who's sort of superficially in the race, and the fact that he's attached to the Christian community, and he's watching your life. And if you don't run a straight path, maybe he'll conclude that Christianity isn't valid.

Lemme show you why I say that. Look at the word lame, verse 13. "Lest that which is lame be turned out of the way." The word lame is kalan. I means lame or halting or limping. Now, it could refer to the weaker Christian. It could definitely refer to the weaker Christian. You'll make some weaker, lame, limping Christian fall all over you. He's having enough trouble just getting down the track. If you start going from side to side, you're gonna be knocking over poor, lame, limping, weaker brothers. It could very well refer to that, and I'm sure that would be a very true analogy, but I think there's something that we need to think of that's beyond that.

What the text is really talking about here is this. Professing Christians who come to the community of the church, they've never been saved, but they sit in the church, and they're either in...they're either going to come to Christ or turn around and apostatize and go back; and by the kind of life you live, you may be a determining factor in which of those things they do.

In Hebrews chapter 2, he's talking about those apostates who would neglect so great salvation. In Hebrews chapter 6, he's talking about those apostates who have all the information, all the revelation. If they fall away, it's impossible for them to be renewed again to repentance, seeing they crucify the Son of God and put Him to open shame. And so he's talking about these apostates in the past, and it seems to me that this is the lame that he's talking about here.

Now, I have another reason for that. Turn in your Bibles to 1 King...1 Kings 18 verse 21, 1 Kings 18:21...Now, remember, the Book of Hebrews continuously alludes to the Old Testament. The author

was obviously an Old Testament scholar, and almost all of the things which he says in there can be traced to Old Testament aforesight. All right, 1 Kings 18:21, now you remember the situation. The situation is Mount Carmel. Elijah the prophet is just tired of having Israel vacillate between God and Baal. They'd go out and live it up with the priestesses of Baal and all kinds of orgies, and then they'd come rolling into the temple on the Sabbath, and it just made Elijah sick. He could not stand superficial religion, and so he said, "I've had it. We're gonna go up there, and we're gonna find out who's God." So verse 21, "Elijah came unto all the people and said, 'How long halt you between two opinions? If the Lord be God, follow Him; if Baal, then follow him.' The people answered him not a word." They were stuck between two opinions, vacillating between God and Baal. They were not true worshippers of God. They carried on a façade of worship. They came into the temple and did their little thing, but they were halting between two opinions.

The actual wording in that verse is translated by the very same word, lame, in Hebrews. The Greek equivalent in the Septuagint says this, "How long will you go lame on both your hams?" That's the actual Greek. The hams being the back part of the thigh. "How long," he says, "will you go lame on the back part of your thigh, sitting around lame? When are you gonna make a decision? When are you gonna commit yourselves to God?" And I think that's the parallel which this writer in Hebrews picks up, and he says the same thing. Here the Greek word kalanis the same one used in the Septuagint of the passage I just read you in 1 Kings. He is saying, "How long are you going to be lame?" in 1 Kings; and here he's saying, "Christian, watch how you live, because one of those halting, limping, lame, professing individuals who's never really come to Christ is watching you; and he is liable, by your life, to be turned out of the way."

In other words, he's liable to just pack it up and go back and say, "Man, I watched some Christians operate. If that's all there is to it, I don't need it."...And I think that gives us a perspective here. Under the pressure of persecution, these Christians were starting to wobble; and they were starting to float from side to side. They were starting to get discouraged, and some of the ones who had come and had an intellectual understanding of Christianity and were on the edge of making a decision, hanging in the balance, were then looking at these Christians, and the writer was saying, "If you guys don't start running a straight path, those guys are gonna turn around and chuck the whole thing." That's what he's saying.

The exhortation then is to born again, truly saved Jews who've left the temple and left the system to live such a straight, such a consistent, such a godly, such a saintly life, running so well, so smoothly, so straight ahead, that the unsaved, intellectually convinced in their midst would say, "Wow, just look at their life. That's what I want."...

The biggest stumbling block in Christianity is Christians so many times. Turned out of the way. That's an interesting thing. That's a medical term...ektreko. It means to be put out of joint. I mean he's already limping. Don't permanently dislocate him. That's what it says. He's already lame,

don't permanently put him out of joint...by failing to give him testimony that he needs to see. That's a very vivid picture, beloved. It says, as we live as Christians, true Christians, we should run so straight, so upright that the halting, lame, limping, watching individual may see a clear, straight path, and be encouraged to follow and come to Christ himself. If you wobble around, if your arms are drooping, if you peter out in the middle of the race, if you start getting mad at God, if you start getting ticked off because you've got some troubles, and you start losing your testimony, somebody who's watching is gonna make that a convenient excuse to throw Christianity out...But God doesn't want that. What does He want in verse 13? "But let it rather be...what?...healed." Yeah, I don't want that lame one permanently dislocated. I want that lame one permanently what? Healed. That's what God wants...

And so I say to you as Christians, beloved, we have a very serious, serious word of exhortation here. Continue, my friend, not only run like Paul did that you may obtain the prize, but run because somebody else is watching who may be on the knife edge of a decision for Christ; and what you do in your life may be just that thing which brings him to Jesus Christ, or it may be that excuse which they use to turn around and walk away. That's serious. I'm sure that in this church, Grace Community Church, there are some people who come here frequently who aren't saved. I know some of them. Others of them I don't know, and some of them cover up well, and I don't know if anybody knows; but I do know this - that there are also some of them, I am confident, who are on the edge of receiving Christ, and they're watching us to see if it's real. Serious responsibility. Christians are billboards. You are billboards advertising Jesus Christ. What does your billboard say?...

In Matthew chapter 5 verse 13 says this, "You're the salt of the earth, but if the salt have lost its savor, with what shall it be salted? It is therefore good for nothing, but to be cast out and trodden under foot of men. You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do men put a light...or neither do men light a lamp and put it under a bushel, but on a lamp stand, and it giveth light unto all that are in the house. So let your light shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in Heaven." That's what he said. He says, "Live your life so other people will glorify God."...

The key is how you live. Remember Peter gave as a practical illustration - 1 Peter chapter 3? You know, talking to you that may have an unsaved husband? He said this. "In the same manner, wives, be in subjection to your own husbands, that if any obey not the Word, they also may...watch this...without the Word be won by the behavior of the wives while they behold your chaste conduct coupled with fear." And he goes on to say, "And you dress yourself even applies your spirituality."

So, you see, there's a very practical way in which we, as Christians are responsible to be very careful, for others are watching, some right on the edge of making a decision for Christ...Not only do I not wanna make my weaker brother stumble, I don't wanna make somebody already limping completely dislocated. I wanna be helping him to be fully healed, coming to know Christ.

All right, second thing, not only continuance, but diligence. The Holy Spirit here says, "I only...I don't only want you to be continuing, I want you to be diligent." Look at verse 14. "Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord, looking diligently lest any man fail of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up trouble you, and by it many be defiled." Diligence is the key in verse 14 and we'll just use verse 14 to illustrate diligence.

For some people, this verse has really been a torment. "Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord." And they think, "Oh, that means works. I've gotta...I gotta make peace, gotta be holy, and I'll get to see God." That's...this verse has been a pain for a lotta people. "Gotta be holy, and they gotta be at peace, and I can pursue and pursue and maybe I'll get saved, earn salvation." That's not what it says. You wanna know something? If you're unsaved, you couldn't pursue peace and catch it if you wanted to. There's no peace to the wicked. Not only that, you couldn't pursue holiness, either. All you'd wind up with was your own righteousness, which is the equivalent of filthy rags. So he's not presenting a method for salvation. He's not saying, "Come on, get saved by running after peace and running after holiness," and the linear idea. Just keep running, keep running, keep running, keep running...

The word follow, deoko, means to continue to pursue. Continue to pursue, to run swiftly in order to catch something is literally what it would say. Run swiftly in order to get something, gain something, win a prize, catch something. Continual pursuit. Well, it certainly can't refer to salvation. If salvation is nothing but some kind of a race to run and run and run till you're panting, "Ooh-ooh, I'm gonna make it. I'm gonna make it." No...

Lemme tell you something. If you're a Christian, you already have peace with God, don't you? If you're a Christian, you already have the righteousness of Jesus Christ positionally. What's he saying then? I think he's talking about practical things. He's saying to these believers, "Hey, believer, watch this one." You are at peace with God. Be a peacemaker. Make your...watch this one...make your practice match your what? Your position. Hey, believer, you are righteous. Act like it. Why? Because people are watching, and if your practice doesn't match your position, then you're talking about it, but you're not doing it, and the unbeliever will stand back and say, "Hey, why don't you practice what you...what?...preach?"...

Listen, man, if Christianity is valid, we oughta be able to prove it by how we live. Sure. He must be speaking in the practical area. Two things he wants. Watch this one. Peace with all men. That's love man. Holiness, that's loving God. He says, "Hey, live a life that's lost in the love of man and the love of God. If you love men, you'll be at peace with 'em. If you love God, you'll be holy." Right? If I really love God, do I wanna do the things that please Him? Of course, that's holiness. If I really love men, do I wanna be at peace with 'em? Of course, that's what peace is all about.

You say, "For what reason should I do this? I mean I'm secure positionally. I have peace with God, the peace of God. I've got the righteousness of Christ imputed to me. I'm secure positionally. Why should I worry about really dedicating my life to pursue down that straight path after peace with all men and after holiness? Why? Why? Because of this. Listen to the statement. "Without which no man shall see the Lord."...

You say, "Well, what is that saying?" Is it saying you can...you can save yourself if you do this? No. What's it saying? I see something specific here. Lemme give it to you. This is purely MacArthur, okay? "Speak this not by commandment, but by permission." I see this. The text, watch it now, on both sides of this verse - this is a very difficult verse to interpret, believe me. I read everything that I could find in print on it, and I wasn't satisfied. The text on both sides of this verse is speaking of our responsibility to the professing Christian, to the...to the intellectually convinced, superficially attached person that we're responsible to really encourage into faith in Christ, not to discourage. Okay. On both sides, the...the verses before and after, the halting, limping, lame ones. Now watch. If we don't practically exhibit peace - that's the love of men - holiness - that's the love of God - no one else will see Christ in us. Okay? "Without which no man shall...what?...see the Lord."

We are supposed to radiate Christ to the world. People, there is only one way that anybody in this world is ever gonna see Christ, and that's when they see in our lives those things which exhibit Him. Love for men. Love for God. I think he's talking about what the world sees in us...If we don't really live that kind of life, then the world can't see. You see, Jesus put it that way, simply He said, "If you don't love one another...in John 13:34, He says...there'll be a terrible disaster....He says...I want you to love another that the world may know...what?...that you're My disciples."

And in John 17, He says, "Father, I pray that they will be one that the world may know that You sent Me. They won't recognize Christ. They won't recognize that we represent Christ unless there's something in us visible." And apart from peace with all men and apart from holiness before God, no man shall see the Lord in us. Why, he's not gonna walk up to you and say, "Oh, you must be a Christian. You have a bumper sticker." He may say that superficially, but he'll watch our life and say, "You know something? You oughta change your bumper sticker. You don't match it too well."

You see, the men's...people who see the Lord, see the Lord because He's living through us. What does it say in Colossians 1:27? It says this, "Christ in you, the hope of glory." If men in this world are ever to see Christ, if they're ever to see the glory of God, where they gonna see 'em? In you, and without peace, without holiness, no man can see the Lord in you. No man can see the Lord in me. Now, notice, it doesn't say here in verse 14, "Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which you shall not see the Lord." No, "without which no man," nobody watching you...You must reveal Christ.

Paul knew this, and he...he stated that he knew it by a most important statement. Galatians 4:19, oh, this is so good. Here is the heart of every really good servant of Christ, every good minister worth anything, this is the heartbeat. Listen to this. Listen to this man's heart. "My little children...to the Galatians, oh, he says...of whom I travail in birth again...he says..."I have like birth pains." What for, Paul? "Until Christ be formed in you." You say, "What are you trying to say, Paul?" The New...New English Bible says, "Until you take the shape of Christ." He's not saying, "I am struggling until Christ dwell in you." He's saying, "I'm struggling until Christ...what?...be formed in you." See? I mean he hurt. He hurt all over. He had pain inside of him waiting for these baby believers to grow up so, not that Christ dwelled in 'em. He already dwelled in 'em, but that Christ would be formed in them...

We are the only Jesus Christ that some people will ever see, right? And I'll tell ya, that's my heart's prayer. I...I'm not interested in how many people are here. Just that. That's not a...I'm not concerned about that. I don't have any concern that you're entertained. I'm not concerned that you have a nice time. I'm concerned with one thing, and I think all of us as elders would agree with this. I'm concerned and they're concerned that Christ be formed in you. I'm concerned with the perfecting of the saints into the image of Christ, that you might grow to the full stature of Christ. Ephesians chapter 4. That's it.

So in order for that to be revealed in us, it demands peace with all men. You say, "MacArthur, does God always make these impossible standards? Follow after peace with all men." Well, lemme give you one that'll take you off the hook. Ready for this? Romans 12:18, you'll like it a little better. Says this, "If it be possible...as much as in you is...or as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men." See, God knows. He says, "If it's possible, as much as lieth in you." In other words, on your part, you make peace. If they don't, that's their problem. You can make peace from your part. Yes, you can do that. You can live peacefully with men. If they don't, that's not for you to worry about.

This afternoon I watched a guy, brand new car, one of those little paper license plates, brand new. I think he picked it up at the car dealer and just got it out the driveway, going up the street, and some guy was in a hurry, and he went around the right, and there was this huge puddle. Just huge, and he just bchhhhhhhwah...Ooooooh. well, this guy apparently had been taken to the car dealer to pick up his car by another guy in another car. So the two of them were together. Well, this guy whipped around the side, just showered this guy's brand new car. Oh, he was mad, very mad. So I watched what happened. Was terrific sermon illustration. I thought I'd stick with it...

So...so the two of 'em got together and decided that they were gonna fix this guy who did that. So they got in front of him. They kept slowing down, slowing down, slowing down, slowing down until this guy couldn't go anywhere, and then they got outta the car. One guy's about 6'5", musta been 230. He's a huge guy, and he got outta the car, and they just took pop cans and just poured them all over the guy's car. Just pop cans all over, and the poor fella, who I'm sure he was about 60 years

old. He was an old gentlemen. He was just sitting there, you know, his dentures were going, you know...and I thought to myself, "You know, that's not how to handle that. That's not how to handle that. Not at all."

I'll never forget one time when I cut off a guy in a Porsche. I was driving a Volkswagen bus, and I...you just don't cut off people in a Porsche...I cut him off. He had a convertible with a hat and the whole routine, you know. Sunglasses, leather jacket, everything. So he pulled up beside me. He started to curse. He just cursed and cursed every...the air was blue, just profanity gushed out of his mouth. And he got all done, I leaned out the window, and I said, "Sir," I said, "You know, you're absolutely right. I just wonder if somewhere in your heart you can find to forgive me." Ohhhhh. He...he ran the thing in first gear and went through a red light, you know. He couldn't handle that.

Like the man said, "Love your enemies. It'll drive 'em crazy."...But, you see, this is what a peacemaker does. Now, "as much as in you lieth, as much as it's possible, make peace." You know, the world is watching us. Are you a peacemaker? You wanna hear something interesting? Jesus said this. Matthew 5, I think it's verse 9, "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called children of God." You want the world to call you a child of God? Be a peacemaker...They're watching. Be a peacemaker. "Live your life," says Peter in 1 Peter 2:23 or whatever it is, "so that you...17 or something...put the silence, the ignorance of foolish men."

Shut the mouths of the critics by the way you live, and not only live for peace toward men, but holiness toward God; and, you know, you can't live with either or the...they go together, right? The wisdom of God is first pure, then peaceable. They always go together. Love toward men, love toward God. So this is what he says, and if you do that, then some others will see the Lord. See?

So what's he say? Continuance? Diligence. Third, last, vigilance. Verse 15, "Looking diligently lest any man fail of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up trouble you, and by it many be defiled." Stop right there a minute. First of all, look at those two words, "looking diligently." Hey, vigilance, looking, this is a fantastic word here. You know what word it is? The word is episkapao, which is the word from which we get bishop, synonymous with elder. It means take thee oversight. As a believer, you are not only responsible for your own life, but you're responsible to look around. Look diligently. Take the oversight. The word bishop in the New Testament, which is overseer, is episkapas. It means overseer. It's the word that describes an elder's duty. An elder is his title. His duty is as an overseer, particularly, beloved elders, and I thank God for the elders in this church who take the oversight, who look diligently about this congregation searching for those things needful to be concerned about.

He says, "Hey, you Christians, instead of getting preoccupied in your problem, start looking out and looking around." You know, Peter said the same thing to the elders in 1 Peter chapter 5. He said, "The elders who are among you I exhort, who are also...am also an elder." Verse 2, "Feed the flock

of God which is among you, taking the oversight of it." Don't only feed 'em, but look at 'em and watch 'em. Christian, are you watching other believers? Are you looking around? Are you really looking to see? Look what it says. "Lest any man fail of the grace of God."

_____ say, "Well, I...I...I see Mr. So and so, and I just don't think he's a Christian. I see him coming, and his wife's a Christian, and, you know, she sings in a choir, whatever, and I...I don't know if he's really saved." Hey, take the oversight. Find that out. Do you question somebody's salvation in the church? Do you? Go to 'em. Say, "Hey, Brother, if you are, I don't know if you're really saved. Are ya?" Now, you may not say it cold turkey like that, but you oughta say it. Say, "Friend, you know, I've watched your life, and I just...I just don't know. Have you ever received Jesus Christ personally in your life?"

Listen, you owe that to the purity of this church and the purity of the body, but, most of all, you owe it to that guy to confront him with the claims of Jesus Christ on a personal basis. There are...there are gonna be a lotta people spend forever in hell who spent their life in the church. That's sad. Now, he says, "You oughta take the oversight, No. 1, lest any man fail of the grace of God." The word fail means to come too late. It means to fall back when you add the term apato the front of it, and, literally, will just say that, "Lest anybody be falling back."

Here's a guy who comes to the church, sees Christianity, sticks around, sticks around, sticks around. Sssssssshuh, falls away into apostasy. Hebrews chapter 6, classic definition. Now he says, "Hey, people, take the oversight. Don't let that happen. Don't let that guy go." You say, "Well, I don't wanna say anything. I...I...I." That's the stupidest remark you could ever make. Ridiculous you don't wanna say anything. "Don't wanna offend." Offend, offend, go offend...Wow, the cross itself is an offense. I mean let's do a little offending, and if a guy's gonna go to hell just because we're afraid to offend him, that's...that's the worst offense imaginable.

These people, you know, grace is available. He says, "They're gonna...grace is available, but they're gonna fall back from grace." He says, "You take the oversight, and you watch, and don't let it happen to him." There's some right here probably at Grace Church who are falling short. We've gotta take the oversight. Our task is a lot like Micah. Micah chapter 4 verse 6 says, "I will assemble her that halteth." And Moffett's translation is great. Micah says, "I'm gonna collect the stragglers." Wouldn't that be a great ministry for all of us who really know Jesus Christ? To just start collecting the stragglers. We always talk about evangelism, "We've got to reach the world." You know, there are people around here all the time who don't know Jesus Christ. We need to collect the stragglers.

Second thing, look around diligently, not only "lest any man fail of the grace of God, but lest any root of bitterness springing up trouble you, and by it many be defiled." You say, "What's the root of bitterness?" That's defined for us in Deuteronomy chapter 29; and, again, it's an Old Testament parallel. Deuteronomy 29:18, listen, and here's the same phraseology. You know this guy got it outta

here, the writer. "Lest...there it is again...Lest there should be among you a man or a woman or family or tribe, whose heart...watch...turneth away this day from the Lord our God to go and serve the gods of these nations, lest there should be among you a root that beareth gall and wormwood." And gall is bitterness. There's the root of bitterness. The root of bitterness is a guy who is superficially identified with the religion of Israel in Deuteronomy, but goes back to paganism or goes away to paganism, and that's exactly the root of bitterness parallel that he picks up in Hebrews. It's the guy who superficially identifies with Christianity, but he goes back.

He goes on in verse 19, "and cometh to pass, when he hears the words of this curse, that he bless himself in his heart, saying, 'I shall have peace, though I walk in the imagination of mine heart' - to add drunkenness to thirst. The Lord will not spare him, but then the anger of the Lord and His jealousy shall smoke against that man, and all the curses that are written in this book shall lie upon him, and the Lord shall blot out his name from under heaven. And the Lord shall set him apart unto evil." God has His strongest Words for one who comes to the truth, who knows the truth, who turns around and walks away from the truth. That man is called, in Deuteronomy chapter 28, a root of bitterness...and that's what he's talking about here. "Take the oversight, people, lest any root of bitterness rise up among you, lest some person fall back into apostasy." Same illustration, just under different terms.

The third, incidentally, lemme add this, that it says in verse 15 "springing up trouble you, and by it many be defiled." You know, you get one apostate, and he'll corrupt a lot of other people. A root of bitterness doesn't exist unto itself. It's a corrupting factor...

All right, the last lest, and this is the sad, well, I think next to Judas, the saddest guy in the Bible. "Lest there be an fornicator...wasn't bad enough that Esau was a fornicator, sexually active apart from the design of God...or profane person like Esau, who for one morsel of food sold his birthright. For you know how afterward, when he would have inherited the blessing, he was rejected; for he found no place of repentance, though he sought it with tears." There was a guy who had a birthright, but he sold it, turned his back on God, and when he wanted it back, he couldn't get it. That's sad...that is sad.

He's a perfect illustration of Hebrews 6, a guy who falls away and it's impossible to be renewed again unto what? Repentance. He couldn't repent. He couldn't repent. You go back to Genesis chapter 25, and you read the story. The two were fighting in the womb, fighting, fighting, fighting. First child came out, Esau, and Esau, the Hebrew form, he was hairy all over, and that's what Esau is - hairy. The next one came out was Jacob, and Jacob had a hold of his heel, and Jacob really means heel, so it was Hairy and Heely. And the two of 'em came out, Hairy and Heely. Later on, Hairy, whom we call Esau, got a nickname, Red, not only because of his, perhaps his red hair, but it's indicated that he, when he came to Jacob and saw what was in the pot, he said, "Gimme some of that red, red." You know, and he...he didn't even say what it was. Just red, red, and so later on he was associated

with red, and that was probably his nickname.

But the two children came out, and you remember what happened. The birthright belonged to Esau, but Esau was profane. You know what that word simply means? It means secular. Esau didn't have one little tiny ounce of concern for the things of God in his whole body. He was a secular man, and he had in one hand a birthright which meant the blessing of God, the Messianic line, the promise of God, and he saw a pot full of red, red, and he said, "Hang the birthright, I'll take a dish of red, red." You know who was a may...he and Judas form the saddest duet that ever lived. Judas had the Messiah, the Prince, the Son of God, and he sold Him for 30 pieces of silver. That's a secular man, and Esau was a Judas. He was an apostate. He was secular.

You know, Jacob, at least Jacob wasn't right, but Jacob at least recognized the value of sacred things, even though he got 'em the wrong way. He at least had something God could work with. As bad as Jacob was, there was in him something with which God could work. In Esau, there was nothing God could work with. He was totally a secular man. He had everything. He had all the promises that his father could give. The covenant he knew well. All the information had been passed on to him. He said, "I don't want it. I want this now." He sacrificed the whole future on the altar of the immediate...and he slaughtered his own destiny, and the sad, sad part is that later on he wanted it back, and he couldn't get it back, even though he cried and cried. Why? Because he couldn't come to repentance.

It says in verse 17, "He was rejected; for he found no place of repentance, though he sought it with tears, tears." He actually cried, but you know what his tears were about? He wanted to kill Jacob. He hated Jacob. He didn't repent. He couldn't find repentance again. He had come to the place where he could've repented. He had fallen away, and he couldn't be renewed again unto what? Repentance. Wasn't...he couldn't get there...Sad, the most pathetic tears in the Bible, tears of Esau. He wept and wept and wept, but he couldn't repent, because he had rejected when God had given him all the information. Willfully, and his rejection became permanent. Permanent.

Beloved, what is he saying to us? He's saying, "Hey, look around, look around. There may be somebody who is on the edge who may make a rejection like Esau, and it'll be permanent. Don't let it happen. Christian...get your second wind. I urge you to continuance, diligence, vigilance, because somebody's watching. Maybe somebody who's at the crucial point of decision....Be the example that brings 'em to Christ, not the stumbling block that turns them away. Let's pray...

Father, we thank You that it is clear that we do not live our lives unto ourselves. That, indeed, no man is an island, but that Thou art...repeatedly concerned that we live in the view of others to Thy glory. Father, I know in my own heart that there have been times when I have been a hindrance more than a help to people. There have been those occasions when my life was a stumbling block, maybe to a weaker brother and, O, Father, worse than that, maybe to a...one who was on the verge

of being a root of bitterness...and I thank You for forgiving me and teaching me again the responsibility that I have...God help me to so live as salt and light, that men may see my life and glorify You. Father, if there's anyone in this place who is on that edge of decision...God, may they see the life of some pure and holy and peacemaking Christian...and be drawn to Thee...God give us the sense of our responsibility...We pray in Christ's name. Amen.

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