

Hebrews 12:15-17 "Don't Fall Short of the Grace of God"

As we come to our text this morning our writer is continuing with the thought we were left with last week, and that is that our daily lives should reveal that we belong to our Lord Jesus. We should be demonstrating the fruit of the Spirit who indwells us and through love and obedience the world should be able to see that we are being conformed into the image of Jesus Christ.

This is what is meant by HEB 12:14 "Make every effort to live in peace with all men and to be holy; without holiness no one will see the Lord."

And so the same theme continues as our writer exhorts these Christians, as well as us, to continue to pursue after righteousness and peace found in Christ.

HEB 12:15 "See to it that no one misses the grace of God and that no bitter root grows up to cause trouble and defile many."

This is very similar to what we read in a couple of different places, one of which is in this same letter.

HEB 4:1-2 "Therefore, since the promise of entering his rest still stands, let us be careful that none of you be found to have fallen short of it. 2 For we also have had the gospel preached to us, just as they did; but the message they heard was of no value to them, because those who heard did not combine it with faith."

GAL 5:4 "You who are trying to be justified by law have been alienated from Christ; you have fallen away from grace."

In these and many other passages God is telling us that to assume that someone has eternal life and yet has tried to substitute God's requirement of faith in Christ alone for their own approach to Him, is to take the grace extended to them and trample on it.

Basically, it's like being given a key to enter the house and then trying to break into the back door. The one sure way of entry is laid aside because it's thought there's a better way in some other way. Someone who knows the importance of the key will not even consider another way.

And so to come short of the grace of God in our text points to that grace which is extended to men and yet in some cases has been

rejected in favor of something fleshly. We'll see how this works itself out in the next few verses.

This passage in Heb.12:15 is addressed to anyone who might fall into the category of neglecting the grace of God found in Christ. Can a believer do this? Most certainly! All of us have at times in our lives tried to live according to the flesh rather than according to the Spirit.

To live according to the flesh is to neglect or to come short of the grace of God. And since much of this letter is a warning against apostasy, it is designed to have true believers soberly consider the path of those who might apostatize and to consider the trends which would alert us to apostasy.

It is not saying that true believers will apostatize but is used as a way to shake us out of our complacency and help us recognize the utter inconsistency of walking in the flesh when we claim we are in the Spirit through faith in Christ.

Now, the true believer, when approached with his or her sin, will consider the behavior and repent and return to the grace of God. The Spirit will enable that wayward one to see the sin and return to the fold.

The unbeliever, who may be in the company of believers, will continue on a path which leads to destruction unless the Spirit of God arrests them in their tracks as He did with Saul on the way to Damascus.

What our writer is saying is that all of us in Christ have an obligation to those in our midst to direct them to the grace of God found only in Christ. Notice how verse 15 begins. "See to it that no one misses the grace of God..." (NIV). The KJV puts it this way, "looking diligently lest any man fail of the grace of God."

The idea here is that we are to oversee, in a sense, those who are in our fellowship with the goal of always encouraging them to seek Christ, not their own way according to the flesh.

In fact the Greek word used for "see to it", or "looking diligently" is *episkopeo*, which is where we get our English word Episcopal. Some of you might recognize this word as it refers to the Episcopal denomination. There are similar words in the Greek including *episkopos* and *episkope* and they mean a superintendent, an overseer. These words are found in 1 Timothy and Titus which

speak of the elders in a church who are called by God to oversee the flock.

The Episcopal denomination has added to the meaning of the word by inferring that, like the Roman Catholic Church, they place rulers over the local elders and pastors who oversee many churches. They have a hierarchy which rules over all their churches. This is not what the Bible teaches since the time that the last apostles have died.

But what is interesting about this word in our text is that it may infer that those elders in those local churches are responsible to see to it that "no one comes short of the grace of God."

But it certainly would not be limited to elders. All of us are called by the Lord to look out for one another; to be there for one another with the express purpose of building one another up in the Lord.

COL 3:16 "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish *one another* with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God."

1TH 5:11 "Therefore encourage *one another* and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing."

HEB 3:13 "But encourage *one another* daily, as long as it is called Today, so that none of you may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness."

And so each one of us needs to be there for one another to see to it that no one comes short of the grace of God. We're prone to wander. A watchful eye from each in the Body will help to protect. But more than that we have a God who does not want us to come short. And so His Holy Spirit will open our eyes and will use His word together with the encouragement of the saints.

But what happens when someone in the body does go down a path which is not seeking after the grace of God? Our writer addresses this as well as he tells us that a root of bitterness will spring up and cause trouble, "and by it many be defiled."

Life doesn't take place in a vacuum. If we're not seeking after the Lord, we will be seeking after something. And more times than not it's a seeking after the flesh. Whenever the flesh takes center stage it places itself above the things of God, and it necessarily comes short of the grace of God because it's not interested in the

grace of God and the means to that grace which is the word, prayer, fellowship, worship, all centering around Christ.

It's often during those times when we can despise God through our hardness of heart as He is trying to teach us. Remember what our writer said in HEB 12:5-6 "And you have forgotten that word of encouragement that addresses you as sons: "My son, do not make light of the Lord's discipline, and do not lose heart when he rebukes you, 6 because the Lord disciplines those he loves, and he punishes everyone he accepts as a son."

When we're not willing to accept our Father's love in discipline we may find that a root of bitterness rears its ugly head. Now when we think of bitterness we usually associate it with mere anger. And bitterness will certainly lead to that, but here in our text bitterness speaks to the heart of the matter as it's compared to something which is not desirable.

The root of bitterness actually comes from another passage found in the O.T.

DEU 29:18 "Make sure there is no man or woman, clan or tribe among you today whose heart turns away from the LORD our God to go and worship the gods of those nations; make sure there is no root among you that produces such bitter poison."

If you're familiar with herbs and spices and roots for cooking or for medicinal purposes you know that there are certain things found in nature which God has created to be very helpful. But there are also many things which may look good and yet may produce death.

A variety of mushrooms will kill if eaten. Many types of plants will also produce adverse effects if ingested. And there are roots which can be very beneficial. If you've ever heard of root beer you may know that it comes from a root.

But there are roots which you wouldn't want to eat or use in recipes which can make you sick or in some cases kill you. The Grolier Encyclopedia states that the "Christmas rose, blooms in late fall and early winter; its leaves and roots contain the poisonous substance anemonin. The roots of American white hellebore, *V. viride*, contain poisonous alkaloids, including veratrine."

I don't know what kind of effect it would have on our bodies, but I certainly don't want to try it out. And yet in a spiritual sense we sometimes don't seem to mind tampering with such roots which are bitter to the taste and non-complementary to the system.

It all stems from coming short of the grace of God. But this root of bitterness also speaks of the depth of the problem. A root is usually that part of the plant which goes deep into the ground and can't be readily seen. It nourishes the plant.

But a root of bitterness is a root which can also go deep, but the only thing it nourishes is more bitterness and the more we feed it the stronger it becomes and invariably it will spring up and cause trouble as our writer says.

The kind of trouble depends on what a person feeds the root; jealousy, anger, hatred, false teachings, envy, and the list goes on. But the result is what we see at the end of verse 15.... "many will be defiled."

There is no such thing as sin being contained to just the person sinning. It will affect others in one way or another.

1CO 12:26-27 "If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it. 27 Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it."

How many times in our lives have we experienced the devastating effect of sin in the life of one person who then spreads that gangrenous poison to the rest of the body? Divisions, grumblings, and so forth will tear at the body and it produces death and many are defiled.

Again, we must understand that this may not be limited to true believers who find themselves in a rebellious state. Non-believers who masquerade as Christians in the body also cause trouble and defile many.

Paul writes in TIT 1:15-16 "To the pure, all things are pure, but to those who are corrupted and do not believe, nothing is pure. In fact, both their minds and consciences are corrupted. 16 They claim to know God, but by their actions they deny him. They are detestable, disobedient and unfit for doing anything good."

This is the person Moses wrote of in that passage of Deuteronomy 29 I quoted from earlier. The passage in Deuteronomy goes on to describe the person spoken of in Titus who claims to know God, but by his actions they deny Him. "They are detestable, disobedient and unfit for doing anything good."

We read in DEU 29:19 "When such a person hears the words of this oath, he invokes a blessing on himself and therefore thinks, "I

will be safe, even though I persist in going my own way." This will bring disaster on the watered land as well as the dry."

Lots of people think they have salvation and yet are the kind of people who persist in going their own way. We can't have it both ways. We can only serve one master. And even when a Christian tries to revert back to the old ways he will find over time that it does not bring satisfaction. But in the meantime they can cause trouble and defile many.

This is why our writer exhorts us to see to it that no one comes short of the grace of God. We must be personally involved in not only being the one who may approach such a person but also praying for them.

Paul brings this aspect of ministry out in GAL 6:1-3 "Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently. But watch yourself, or you also may be tempted. 2 Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ. 3 If anyone thinks he is something when he is nothing, he deceives himself."

Being spiritual is being mature in Christ as we walk with Him by faith. It does not mean we are better than someone else; that's spiritual pride. It becomes very difficult to restore someone who is struggling if we place ourselves above them because if we think we are something when we are nothing, as Paul says, then we will deceive ourselves.

And then we will find ourselves being tempted to think of ourselves more highly than we ought and deceive ourselves which can result in a root of bitterness springing up and causing trouble and by it defile many.

We must always be on our spiritual toes, seeking the grace of God so that we don't fall short. In this way we can be useful to each other in the Body of Christ and His work can go forward instead of always trying to put out fires the enemy is lighting in the lives of people.

But our writer goes on to explain the deceitfulness found in those who will not seek the grace of God. He compares them to Esau.

HEB 12:16 -17 "See that no one is sexually immoral, or is godless like Esau, who for a single meal sold his inheritance rights as the oldest son. 17 Afterward, as you know, when he wanted to inherit

this blessing, he was rejected. He could bring about no change of mind, though he sought the blessing with tears."

Esau was the brother of Jacob and he was a man who was more concerned with his stomach than the spiritual blessings promised by God. Esau was the older brother and as such had the birthright coming to him. But on one occasion he was extremely hungry.

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

Years later, Jacob and his mother conspired to fool Isaac into blessing Jacob instead of Esau. They were successful, but Esau came in later and demanded to regain his blessing to the point of crying many tears. But his sin came many years before when spiritual things meant nothing to him and even in this case he wasn't as concerned with his father's spiritual blessing as he was with the physical.

Esau had sorrow in his heart, but it was not a godly sorrow, it was a selfish sorrow. This is the point of our writer in Hebrews. We must not promote a religiosity that does not include the grace needed to have a right relationship with God through Christ alone.

If we are promoting a worldly or carnal approach to God then we will produce all sorts of Esau's and we will come short of the grace of God and there will be bitter roots which will not support the vine of Christ as only our Lord can.

Notice what Paul says of true grace as it's sought from God, and how he compares this with the type of worldly approach to God which has a form of godliness but denies it's power.

2CO 7:8-10 "Even if I caused you sorrow by my letter, I do not regret it. Though I did regret it - I see that my letter hurt you, but only for a little while - 9 yet now I am happy, not because you were made sorry, but because your sorrow led you to repentance. For you became sorrowful as God intended and so were not harmed in any way by us. 10 Godly sorrow brings repentance that

leads to salvation and leaves no regret, but worldly sorrow brings death."

This was the sorrow of Esau. In fact, this was the sorrow of Judas who betrayed Christ. Judas was sorry that he had dealt this way with the Lord, but instead of leading him to Christ seeking forgiveness, he went out and hanged himself.

Cain essentially reacted the same way as Esau. After the Lord judged Cain for murdering his brother Abel we read in GEN 4:13-14 "Cain said to the LORD, "My punishment is more than I can bear. 14 Today you are driving me from the land, and I will be hidden from your presence; I will be a restless wanderer on the earth, and whoever finds me will kill me."

He was only concerned with his life. Nothing is mentioned about him being sorry for killing his brother and seeking God for forgiveness. He persisted in going his own way. He was not repentant.

And so here in our text today there is a warning to the church that we do not persist in going our own way. To pursue that only brings destruction if we do not get off that path and seek the grace found in Christ alone.

This is why Peter tells us in 2PE 1:10-11 "Therefore, my brothers, be all the more eager to make your calling and election sure. For if you do these things, you will never fall, 11 and you will receive a rich welcome into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ."

For if you do these things, you will never fall? What things? What Peter had been talking about previously in that same letter.

2PE 1:3-9 "His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. 4 Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires. 5 For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; 6 and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; 7 and to godliness, brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness, love. 8 For if you possess these qualities in increasing measure, they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord

Jesus Christ. 9 But if anyone does not have them, he is nearsighted and blind, and has forgotten that he has been cleansed from his past sins."

Essentially what Peter is saying, and what our writer of Hebrews has been saying, is that there should be a self-examination of our lives. Not just to see if we're in Christ but to see if we're walking with Christ according to His word.

Are we manifesting the fruit of the Spirit? Are we seeking to know more of Christ in His word? Are we loving the brethren? Are we seeing to it that no one comes short of the grace of God as we love them with the truth? Do we have a desire for the lost?

The Spirit of God working in our lives will work in and through us and will equip us for the work as He accomplishes His will. It's a good thing to examine ourselves and to evaluate where we stand with Christ periodically.

Our examination should always start with our salvation and rejoice in the fact that He has given us life. When writing the Corinthian church Paul wrote in 2CO 13:5-6 "Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith; test yourselves. Do you not realize that Christ Jesus is in you -unless, of course, you fail the test? 6 And I trust that you will discover that we have not failed the test."

How does anyone fail the test? Do we fail the test if we don't feel saved? No, we fail the test if we have not come to Christ and humbled ourselves before Him confessing our sin and seeking His forgiveness and by faith trusting that He has paid our debt.

But in that examination we must also look to see if Christ's life is being made manifest as the Spirit of God is working in us. Do we feel grieved when we sin? Are we sorrowful over sin and desire to come to Him for forgiveness? These are the signs of a child who knows the Lord loves him. These are the signs of adoption whereby we cry out, Abba Father.

Cain was only grieved that he had lost a possession and that someone may desire to kill him. There was no godly sorrow.

2CO 7:10 "Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret, but worldly sorrow brings death."

Praise God we have life in Christ. Praise God that salvation is found in no one else and that we have come to that Great Shepherd

who loves us and sought us out and leads us in paths of righteousness for His sake and His glory.

Praise God that we have a hope that cannot be taken away, a hope that God is working out in our lives as we humble ourselves before Him.

Paul says in PHI 2:12-13 "Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed - not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence -continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, 13 for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose."

God is working in our lives. He is conforming us into His Son's image. I thank God that that inward work doesn't fall on my shoulders. That's His work. My work is to trust Him and walk with Him by faith each day knowing that He is faithful to do His will in and through me.

But I also praise God He provides the means to walk with Him. I'll end with HEB 13:20-21 "May the God of peace, who through the blood of the eternal covenant brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, 21 equip you with everything good for doing his will, and may he work in us what is pleasing to him, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen."

He will do it. You're His child in Christ.