



Our Fight with Sin-Part 6

Recalling Why This is So Important

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Yeah, I wasn't able to join you, as a lot of you know, last week, because I, with the help of many of you, moved into our newly purchased home. My family of five, we got them moved into a new place. It was an eventful weekend, I can tell you that. At one point, an onlooker said that he had never seen so many people help one family move. It was something. And at another point in the morning, at my apartment where we were moving out, the crowd had assembled, and we had a neighbor from another apartment there in our complex come by and mill about our apartment, and start taking my stuff and moving it to his apartment. I'm not kidding. When confronted, he said, "Oh, I just thought it was all just up for grabs." (1:31)

Now, it did look a little like a looting scene, I imagine, but I'm still not buying his story. Our move was a chaotic day and, um, you know, there are boxes everywhere and our new house is disheveled and I still can't find our box of baseball hats, and there's just a lot of things missing, maybe at my friend's apartment, I'm not sure. But I realize that it was a stressful day. It reminded me of that chart that the University of Washington produced. You might remember this, a lot of us encountered this at one point in our studies, where they tried to rate various events in our lives and give them an assigned number of stress points. Do you remember that chart? Well, I looked it up just for fun to see where moving into a new house fell on the list of stress points. And I discovered that it falls somewhere between a jail term and being seriously injured. Which, with the mortgage and the move it's a little of both, actually. And I, you know, it's not quite that bad, but I realize that there is a lot of stress related to all of this. But you know, you have to kind of put that aside, because if you focus on the sore backs and the pinched fingers and the scattered boxes, you may get discouraged and feel like this isn't worth it. But you have to step back every now and then in the process, and you have to remember why you're doing it. That we're moving from this very small apartment to a home because it's a really good thing to do, and it'd be good to raise our three growing children in more than one little room. It's a good thing. We need a house, and we're in a house, and so yeah, it's a little chaotic and a little uncomfortable for a while, but it's well worth it. If you don't have that perspective, you may get discouraged. (3:29)

In the book of Hebrews we've been looking at what can be a discouraging topic. Not a lot of churches like to have a series about sin, and certainly don't want to use the word "fight" in their series' title. And I know that there is a sense of negativity about this eight week series that we've found ourselves in the middle of. But I love the fact that now as we reach verse 14, for the next four verses the writer of Hebrews wants to do just that. He wants to step back for a few minutes and just remember why we're doing this. We want to remind us why we're going through all the uncomfortable experience of exposing sin, looking at our temptations, and resolving to fight and battle sin in our lives. And he gives all the important reasons why this is a critical, critical thing for us to do. (4:19)

And so if you have your Bibles, I want you to turn there and a passage that may feel a little like a review of the fundamentals. Like, I often say that Vince Lombardi locker room discussion where he tells these seasoned football players, and he pulls out a football and he says, "This is a football. And that is the goal line." And he's kind of reminding them of the whole fundamentals of the game. And so it is in Hebrews 12:14 that the writer of Hebrews says, okay, now let's just remember what this is all about. Let's try and find out again why this is so important. And he puts it this way in verse 14. (4:59)

He says, "Make every effort to live in peace with all men." And he says that because the expression of our sanctification, or our battle to be godly, is usually seen as succeeding or failing often in the realm of our relationships. But then he gets back to the point, and he says it succinctly

at the end of this first phrase. He says, “and to be holy. Make every effort to live at peace with all men and to be holy.” And then he gives this jarring phrase—are you ready for this one? I mean, this kind of jars the Sunday school theology that we grew up with. He says, “Without holiness, no one will see the Lord.” I mean, if you really understand this in the context, that becomes a pretty huge statement. I mean, without holiness, we’re not even going see God. So then he says, “See to it that no one misses the grace of God and that no bitter root grows up to cause trouble and defile many. See to it that no one is sexually immoral or godless like Esau”—that Old Testament twin, the outdoorsman—“who for a single meal sold his inheritance rights as the oldest son.” And when afterward, as you know, the writer of Hebrew says, he wanted to inherit this blessing, he was rejected, and he could bring about no change of mind though he sought the blessing with tears. Here’s a sad picture of a guy who should have been blessed, who thought he had the blessing, and because he was governed by his appetites and did what he wanted to do when he wanted to do it, in the end as an illustration for us he ends up not receiving the blessing that he should have otherwise received. (6:40)

This is a tough passage, but it really brings us back to what’s at stake. Our discussion for the last four or five weeks has been we’ve got to fight sin. We’ve got to be committed to our process of sanctification. We’ve got to fight temptation and work at being godly. As a matter of fact, that’s the first word translated in three English words in verse 14: “Make every effort.” Give it your all. Make sure you’re going all out in this fight. But the way that he frames it puts it in such a way as to tell us not just that it’s a good idea or there’s a lot at stake, he really says there’s everything at stake. He says you’ve got to live at peace with all men, and to be holy. Pursue that. Go after it. He says because—here it comes—without holiness no one will see the Lord. (7:24)

Now before you go to redefine that, or just ignore it, or kind of talk your way around it, we need to analyze it and try and find out what exactly he’s trying to say. I mean, what does that mean? I mean that seems so antithetical to a lot of our basic understanding of Christianity. What he’s saying clearly is that whatever this process of sanctification involves, the process is critically important. It’s required. As a matter of fact, the ending illustration about Esau says that you’ve got to do what is right to govern your appetites so that you receive the blessing. That’s a big deal. You can’t just let your appetites and your impulses rule your life. It’s critically important, and the illustration brings us to the concept of salvation and makes us think, wow. We better fight sin. It’s a big deal. It’s not optional, it’s required. (8:18)

Number one on your outline. If you found that in your worship packet pull it out and jot this down. When it comes to what this passage is saying to us, the first thing we’ve got to underscore is that an all-out fight with sin is required. Number one: You got to realize that. That an all-out fight with sin is not an option. An all out fight with sin, to put it this way, to make every effort to be holy, it’s required. You cannot be a Christian and not do this. It’s a must. It is part of the *sine qua non* of being saved. You cannot be a Christian and not be fighting sin. And if you say well that just doesn’t sound right, because I understand the gospel a little differently. And I went to Sunday school, and I know what the Bible says, and the Bible says that our salvation has nothing to do with what we do. And you’re telling me that if we don’t curtail sin, then we don’t get to go to heaven. (9:11)

Well, number one, I’m not saying that. That’s what this passage seems to be saying. And before we reject it we’ve got to say well wait a minute. Is this some kind of contradictory truth? Is this somehow antithetical to the concept of grace in the New Testament? And I think the next verse makes it clear that there is no contradiction here. Because the writer of Hebrews makes it clear, and ultimately the Holy Spirit who is the author of this text, he makes it clear that grace is all about his theology. He says, “See to it”—look at verse 15—“that no one misses the grace of God.” Okay? So let’s start with that and then we’ll work backwards. (9:47)

Pointy finger number one, or letter A. When it comes to salvation, let us just reaffirm what the writer of Hebrews understand and what the New Testament teaches. Letter A, that salvation is

by grace. There's no contradiction here. To say that fighting sin is required, that it's not an optional thing for the Christian life, is not to deny that salvation is by grace. So let's start at the starting point by reaffirming that basic truth. The Bible teaches that if you're going to receive eternal life, you can't earn it. That's what grace is all about. That if you're going to go to heaven, you can't do enough good things to get there. And I know that that's what makes us distinctive as Christians, because the rest of the religious systems in this world, including a lot that call themselves Christians, are all about trying to do enough good things to get accepted in the eyes of God. And we reject that, right? We're evangelical Christians. We believe that the message of the gospel, the *evangelion*, the thing that makes us different from the world religions trying to work their way into God's favor, is that we receive it as a gift. That God gives it by grace. And the Bible teaches that, and there's no contradiction in verse 14 to the concept of grace in verse 15. He's concerned that we are in grace, that we have the grace of God. (11:06)

And just to underscore this from a passage that I know a lot of learned as kids, I want to turn to the book of Titus. Titus 3. Paul writes to Titus, he's a pastor in Crete, just off in the middle of Mediterranean off the shores of Israel, and he tells Titus to remember the basics of the Gospel. He wants him to teach the doctrine of grace, and he spells it out in some of the most clear and unmitigated words in the New Testament. Titus 3. Here's the backdrop of anything we learned about sanctification. We have to be clear about justification. How do we get right with God? Look at verse 4. After reviewing here, you can glance through it. The fact that all of us have sinned, we've had issues in our lives. Clearly, we've transgressed God's law. He says in verse 4 of Titus 3, he says, "But when the kindness and the love of God our savior appeared, he saved us"—verse 5—"not because of the righteous things we had done." (12:08)

Doesn't that make us different than all your friends out there who are trying to do enough good things to make God accept them? Right? If you said to them, you know, "are you going to heaven when you die" they've got the big old scale mentality: "Well, I'm trying to do more good things than bad things and God's going to look at the good things I do and hopefully it'll be more than 51 percent, and God will say, 'Come on in.' " And we've all learned that God doesn't grade on a curve, that God is not going to let you in because you're more righteous than you are wicked. That's not how it works. You have to exchange all of your good deeds, and you need to embrace the righteousness of God. And the Bible calls that salvation, and right here as clearly as can be said is that when you're saved it has nothing to do with what you've done. "He saved us"—verse 5—"not because of the righteous things we had done, but because of his"—what's the word?—"mercy." That means you don't deserve it. "He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our savior." He's the one who did it. It's based on his work, not your work. "So that"—here's the concept of justification, verse 7—"having been justified"—that means I'm made right, I'm made acceptable to God—"having been justified by his"—what's the word—"grace"—that's what it's all about—"we might become heirs"—that means that we're not going to inherit something good—"having the hope"—which is not finger crossing hope, that's not New Testament hope—"that's the confidence of eternal life." (13:28)

So how can I have confidence of eternal life? I can trust in the work of Christ, and not in the good deeds that I do. So salvation has nothing to do with the good deeds that I've done. If I'm a Christian and going to heaven, I've got to be able to say it has nothing to do with my good works, it has everything to do with the work of Christ. That's grace. That's the biblical definition of grace. And by the way, let me talk about some of your friends, or maybe some here this morning, who think, "Well, I kind of believe in that, but it's kind of my good works, too." (13:57)

Jot this down if you would. Galatians 5:2. We don't need to turn there but some time just spend a morning reading the book of Galatians, and get it really clear in your mind that if you're trying to embrace the grace of God, plus your good works, you will not be saved. You cannot have

it both ways. If you're going to be a Christian, you're a Christian solely on the work of Christ and it has nothing to do with your good deeds. And Galatians 5:2 deals with the common way to do good works in that day, which in a Jewish context was to go through the ceremonial law. And one of the things was circumcision. And in chapter 5, verse 2, Paul says to the Galatian churches, if you allow yourself to be circumcised, which was all to try and gain merit with God—if you allow yourself to be circumcised, he says, then Christ is of no value to you. (14:50)

Did you catch that? In other words, if you're trying to earn your salvation then Christ is of no help to you. And here's the deal. You'll lose. You won't be saved. The only way we can become Christians is to take all of our righteousness and exchange it for the righteousness of Christ. That's the gospel of grace. Right? There's nothing new there. You're going, "Haw, I hear that all the time." Well, you may hear that all the time, but most people in the world don't hear that all the time. You realize that right? They don't get that. That's news to them. But that's what the Christian faith is all about. We're trusting in the good work of Christ. (15:21)

If you don't trust in the good work of Christ to be saved, that's called, by the way—and this is so important—that's called legalism. All your non-Christian friends and even some of your quote-unquote Christian friends always misuse that word. Legalism means that I'm trying to do good works to get saved. Does the Bible teach that? No, it's wrong. The error, or the heresy, is called legalism. Great. (15:44)

Now. Back to Hebrews—you know, keep your finger in Titus because we'll go back there—but back for a moment to Hebrews 12. Verse 14, now, becomes jarring against the backdrop of grace. Because in our minds, if our salvation has nothing to do with our good works, what's this statement all about that we got to make every effort to live in peace with all man and to be holy, because without holiness no one will see the Lord. I don't understand. I thought I get to see the Lord, and that it has nothing to do with my good deeds. (16:15)

You're absolutely right. Here's the truth. OK? Letter B, pointy finger number 2. Real grace—here's the truth—real grace fights sin. If you have embraced real biblical grace, then your life will necessity, it will fight sin. That's why our fight against sin is required and non-optional, because you cannot be a Christian and have real grace in your life, without that grace moving us to fight sin. Give you an example, back to Titus. Go to Titus 2. Paul has already spelled this out. He's made it very clear, though he is going to underscore justification by grace, he's going to make it clear that sanctification is required because of justification. (17:04)

Let's take a look at this. Titus 2:11. Titus 2:11 says, "For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men." All kinds of people. It's not just Jews now, it's Gentiles, it's barbarians, is Scythians, it's all kinds of—it's Greeks, it's everybody. And it teaches us when you're saved—right, you have that grace that brings salvation—it teaches us to say no to ungodliness and worldly passions. That's what real grace does. It instructs us to fight sin and to live self-controlled and upright and godly lives in this present age. And we do that while we're waiting for the blessed hope, which is the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ who gave himself for us—here's the purpose of his coming—to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good. (17:53)

Now when people say, "Why did Jesus come?", a lot of us focus on the justification aspect of it. He came to die in our place so that we wouldn't have to go to hell, and if we would trust in his life and his death we would be justified. That's true, but this text says he also came for the purpose of freeing us—that's what redeeming means—from the wicked behaviors that we have, and to purify for himself a people that are eager to do good. You tracking with that? Part of his coming was not just to save us from the penalty of sin—that's justification—he came also to redeem us from the practice of sin—that's sanctification. And his purpose in coming was two-fold. And

here's the deal, you can't have the first without the second. You cannot be justified and not be prompted by grace to be sanctified. (18:38)

And if you're going, well, that's not news to me, well you know what? It's new to a lot of church-goers today. There are people in tons of churches today that are taught this. See if some of this sounds familiar: You can be a Christian and embrace the grace of God, and then you know what? Ah, it may or may not change your life. You may or may not get serious about this thing called obedience. But maybe later in your Christian life, you'll hit this kind of second level—and we've got all kinds of names for it depending on what church you go—we might call it discipleship, right? We might call it getting rededicated to the Lord. We might call it, kind of, getting to that second level where we really get serious about all this. Which, by the way, there are some wonderful passages on all that rededication and getting serious about the Lord, right, in 1 Hezekiah, and 2 Opinions, and you know, 3 Contemplations. Right? It's not in here. Are you tracking with that? It's not here. There is no second level to Christianity. The reality of the Bible is simple this: if you are saved by the grace of God, that grace of God is going to drive you to become holy. And if your life is not becoming more holy, then you are not justified. Therefore, the writer of Hebrews can say, without holiness, no one will see the Lord. And that's not imputed holiness, that's the practice of holiness. (20:02)

Well I thought we didn't earn our salvation by our good deed. We don't! See? But if we have been given the grace of God, it transforms our life and he produces in us people that are eager to do what is good. Verse 15, we might as well read that if you're still in Titus 2 because it would be a good thing for us to not be ashamed of this doctrine. He says "These things then," he says, "you are to teach, encourage, rebuke with all authority, and do not let anyone despise you." And I'm called a heretic. People take my CDs and pass them out as examples of heresy because I teach the doctrine that if you are justified, you will necessarily then be called by God to be sanctified. OK. And that's not Wesleyan perfectionism. I'm not saying you're going to be perfect, but I'm going to say—as we've been saying for the last five weeks—that you're going to become more and more and more and more like Christ. And that's not something that's an option for the Christian. God is going to produce in you a changing life. (20:59)

Well, my Uncle Jim, he accepted the Lord—whatever that means; look that one up by the way—when he was young, and now you know he just kind of lives for himself. And he doesn't go to church, and he doesn't read his Bible, but I know I'm gonna see him in Heaven, 'cause he accepted the Lord—whatever that means—when he was, like, 12. (21:25)

You know what Jim's life is when you say that? Jim's life is a contradiction, 'K? And that means—let me put it in these phrases—he claims to be a follower of Christ; he just doesn't happen to be following Christ. And if you say, well that's stupid. There are entire seminaries built on that one doctrine, that you can be a follower of Christ and not have to follow Christ. It's a contradiction. (21:52)

Esau's life was a contradiction. If you're the child of blessing—and I know he's an illustration here—you cannot live by your impulses. If you're a child of blessing, a son of the blessing, you ought to act like a son of the blessing. But instead he's willing to trade his inheritance rights for a bowl of stew. And the Bible says his life is a contradiction, and the illustration for us is driven home by the fact that when it came for time to see if he was going to get the blessing, he didn't get the blessing. And because he didn't get the blessing, he begged and pleaded, "Oh please, let me get the blessing," and he never got it. He could bring about a change of mind even though he sought it with tears. (22:32)

Jesus said something similar. He said, "Not everybody who says to me 'Lord, Lord' will enter the kingdom of Heaven." Remember that? "Many will come to me on that day," Matthew 7 says, and say 'Didn't I do this, didn't I do that,' and he'll say, "Depart from me. I never knew you, you who practice lawlessness." Wickedness. Sin. He says I don't care what you did do, here's

what you didn't do. You didn't fight sin in your life. And you know what? That proves that your justification was a fantasy. It wasn't real. Let's put it this way: serious efforts at sanctification prove the reality of your justification. Boy, that would make a good bumper sticker. Jot that down. That's a good one. Too long for a bumper sticker. Get a big bumper and write this down, right? Serious efforts at sanctification, right? They prove the reality of your justification. That's what the Bible is teaching here. (23:32)

And if your life is a contradiction, let's get into the uncomfortable period of the sermon. Are you ready? If your life is a contradiction, pointy finger number three, letter C: If your life is a contradiction, you're a counterfeit. You're not real. If your life is a contradiction, you are a counterfeit. You still in Titus? Look at Titus 1 once you jot that down. Titus 1. I mean, he's hit all of these things. Because Crete, by the way, was a place where people weren't really big on sanctification. And because of that, he has to hit all of these topics hard. He says in Verse 16 of Titus 1—are you looking at that? It says, “They claim to know God but by their actions”—what?—“they deny him.” It's what your mom used to say. What did she say? Actions speak louder than words. Lot of people saying, “Oh, you know, I know God. I'm a Christian. I've accepted Jesus.” Right? And if your life doesn't show it, the Bible here describes them. They are to God, they are in reality, they are in the apostles' mind, detestable, disobedient, and unfit for doing anything good. Actions speak louder than words. (24:55)

Contradictions are counterfeits. Let's put it this way. There are a lot of people going to church, week after week, and they will not make it to Heaven. And they won't make it Heaven not because justification is earned. They won't make it to Heaven because their justification isn't proved by their sanctification. Sanctification is not the earning of your salvation either. It is the evidence of your justification. This principle is so important in a day where everybody wants to say, “Well, I just believe in the grace of God. I know it's all going to work out, and I don't have live for God. It doesn't matter, I don't have to fight sin, because the grace of God covers it all.” The Bible says without a serious effort at sanctification, you're never going to see God. (25:38)

Well what about those people who don't have a lot of time? They're on their deathbed and they become Christians. Let's think about the only deathbed conversion that we've got an example of in the Scripture. He was the thief hanging on the cross next to Christ, right? Even in the last hours of his life, did he produce any good fruits? Think about it. Yeah, I guess he did. What did he do? He stood up for Christ, hanging naked on a cross, rebuking the other guy on the other side telling him to shut up. And he stood up for truth. Now he lived a life as a total pagan, but in the last hour, even in that last hour of conversion, he showed a changed life. And had he had the ability to get off the cross and live for another 20 years, do you think you would have seen a changed life out of him? Absolutely. Because justification always necessarily brings sanctification. (26:25)

I got to turn you to this passage. 1 John 3. I mean, this is so explicit and—I know there are people that will still leave here and say, “I don't really agree with that 'cause you know, I know a lot of people that are Christian but they don't act like it.” Well, then we got to at least read this passage, because this isn't my doctrine, this is the Bible's doctrine. 1 John 3:5. Let's start there. (26:50)

“But you know that he”—that is Christ—“appeared so that he might take away our sins.” Now, immediately we think of two things. We can think just in terms of justification; he came to pay for the penalty of our sin and justify us. But also, he's about to make the case that he also came, as we already saw in Titus, to take away our practice of sin. He wants to change that. He wants to mitigate that in increasing measure. “But you know that he appeared so that he might take away sin”—and here's the sanctification part—“and in him”—if you're living in him, if you're in him, and that's a great phrase that the apostles love—“if you are in him, there is no sin.” In other words, you can't walk in fellowship with God and be in sin. (27:31)

No one, quote-unquote, who lives in him keeps on sinning. You can't have a relationship with Christ and continue with the same pattern of sin your life. No one who continues to sin has either—here's the phraseology of Hebrews 12—has either, what: seen him. Isn't that the point? Without holiness you'll never see God. And you know what? You've never seen him, if your life is unchanged by the gospel, or known him. "Dear children, do not let anyone lead you astray." And I gotta tell you—I know some of you are just, "you know, why is he so worked up? I don't get it." You know what? You gotta to get out there and you got to read a little bit. You got to talk to your Christian friends about this doctrine, and I guarantee ya, there are people adamantly trying to lead you astray. (28:14)

In our own hearts we want to lead ourselves astray. We can't imagine to think that someone is not saved if they've got a testimony about some experience way in their past. We struggle with this. But the apostle says don't let anyone lead you astray. "He who does what is right"—that's a pattern, that's sanctification—"is righteous"—that's justification. He has his justification if he is growing in sanctification. "He who does what is right is righteous just as he is righteous." Verse 8. "He who does what is sinful is of the devil, because the devil has been sinning from the beginning." (28:50)

Well that must mean big sins. That must mean, I don't know, guys on the 11 o'clock. I can't imagine that's my little secret sins that I don't do anything about. This whole concept is about you attacking sin in your life, and without a growing effort and a growing success in sanctification, it proves that your justification is not real. Because real grace fights sin. The reason the Son of God appeared—middle of verse 8—was to destroy the devil's work, which is not just the penalty of sin, because that is ultimately God's just response. The devil's work is the process of sin in our lives, and the son of God wants to destroy that. No one—verse 9—who is born of God will continue to sin. (29:31)

Oh, you're teaching perfectionism, and since I've never experienced that then this doctrine is false. That's not what it's saying. All of these phrases, by the way, are in what we call the continuative tense. There are five tenses in the Greek language, and we have three: past, present, and future. There are five in Greek, and the one that is represented here is what we often learn in first year grammar. A continuative tense. It speaks of an ongoing reality. The lot of these are continuative participles. It's an ongoing thing in your life, with an I-N-G. You're sinning. And you keep on sinning. And the Bible's really clear here, you can't continue to sin. You can't keep on sinning the same way you did before. Because there's something different about you. God's seed remains in you. Right? He cannot go on sinning because he's been born of God. Justification changes you, and you begin to change your relationship to sin. (30:22)

This is how we know who the children of God are, and who the children of the devil are. Colon. Anyone who does not do what is right is not a child of God. Nor is anyone who does not love his brother, which is one of the external outgrowths of our sanctification, if we watch how we relate to our wife, to our kids, to our friends, to our neighbors, to our coworkers. And the bottom line is, if you're not showing progress in sanctification, if you're not making a serious effort at putting away temptation and sin, it proves that you don't quite understand justification. And you're not a participant in grace. (30:51)

"I just can't buy that." Well then you can't buy John 3. You can do all you want to talk around that, or say, "Well I'm not the Holy Spirit in everybody's life, and I don't want to judge people like that." Well, Jesus taught us to do this. Matthew 7:16. He says—here it is, you've heard this before—"by their fruits you will recognize them." Right? You'll know them by their fruits. And the point is, you should be able to tell. Christians will have changed lives. And changing lives. (31:17)

Gotta be perfect! That's what Pastor Mike taught this morning. Is that what I taught? I didn't say that. But you better be fighting sin. There ought to be, as the writer of Hebrews says, an extreme

effort. Make every effort to be holy. Are you making every effort to be holy? If you say no because you're relying on the grace of God, jot this one down: Jude 4. There are people that have crept in among you that turn the grace of God into a license to sin. In other words, they say, "Well, I'm not trying hard to be holy because, whatever, I believe in the grace of God." The Bible calls that out as heresy. (31:49)

Wow. Who. Really? Yeah. Really.

Hebrews 12. Let's go back there for a second. Now that's the ultimate motivation. Why are we going through the hassle of fighting sin? Well, because it's part and parcel of real Christianity. I've got no choice. I don't even have grace in my life if I'm not fighting sin. But he gives us more motivation. He says in verse 15: "See to it that no one misses the grace of God." Make sure they all have the grace of God which would be evidenced by making every effort to be holy. He says, "And see to it that no bitter root grows up"—and then he describes the problem with sin, when sin is growing in our lives as opposed to righteousness growing in our lives, here's what it does: it causes trouble and defiles many. Here's another motivation. One of the reasons we fight this thing is because sin unchecked in our lives creates trouble, according to verse 15, and defiles many. There are a lot of consequences to ongoing sin that we ought to fear. (32:52)

Number two. Let's jot it down that way. We ought to fear the consequences of ongoing sin. Now these are long points. I'm sorry, I don't know why. I was out of practice for a week. But, that was the best I could do. Fear the consequences of ongoing sin. And that means that if sin is growing in my life instead of sanctification or holiness, then what I ought to recognize is that I should be expecting an increase of trouble and defilement. And this is not the discipline; we already dealt with that, God is going to discipline his wayward children. But this is the fact that sin itself, if it's unchecked and growing in our lives, causes trouble. It causes defilement. It hurts in two ways. I've got two subpoints here. Let's start with this one. (33:37)

Defiles many. Because this is addressed to the church, I'm seeing the many here as the people that the writer of Hebrews is talking to, and that's the assembled church, people that are coming together to worship God and listen to preaching. OK? So. Let's put it this way, that one of the consequences is, Letter A, it hurts the church. The church is hurt. If you don't take care of sin in your life and fight it, and you let it grow in your life, the church will be hurt. Let's look at that from a couple perspectives. Let's look at the word "defilement," for instance. (34:08)

That's a word that is sometimes translated, or at least explained and described and defined, as contamination. When one part of the body of Christ is filled with lives that have unchecked sin, whether it's—and let's look at the examples in the passage—bitterness, verse 15, sexual immorality, verse 16, or general godlessness of the expedience of the Esau who just did whatever he wanted to do whenever he wanted to do it. When there's bitterness, sexual immorality, and general godlessness in your life, here's the deal. That contaminates the many. It defiles many. You don't sin in a vacuum. You sin in a network of relationship, and whatever you think your sin might do by way of defilement, times it by 10. Actually, times it by 20. Because that's the reality of it. And from my perspective, and perhaps from your perspective, you can look back at times where you saw someone who had some sin in their life and they thought, well this won't really affect too many people. And it has this domino effect. It has this ripple effect. You cannot let bitterness, sexual immorality, or general godlessness grow in your life without it effecting many people. And if you think it's gonna effect 10 people, times that by 10, and maybe you'll be close to the effect that that will have. (35:28)

Sexual immorality, want to cut corners there? It will have a domino effect. And it will defile many. It will hurt the church, it will contaminate the church. And the best, most vulgar way—I didn't mean for it to be vulgar—I could think of it was eating outside. As I was eating outside last week there was some guys here from the office, and I thought to myself as the birds flew overhead, wouldn't it be terrible, ah, as Jess was eating a pizza, wouldn't it be terrible if the bird just dropped

a little surprise on the pizza? That would kind of end the lunch for us, wouldn't it? You know? Bbllllp! I'll have another piece. No, I won't. I don't want it. OK? That's the concept of defilement, right? I don't want any more pizza with the bird turd on it, right? I don't care. I'm not gonna eat around it. The whole thing to me is defiled. Let's order another one, right? I don't want to eat the turdy pepperoni pizza. That's defilement. And from God's perspective, he can't have unchecked sin in the lives of some people in the church without it defiling many people. And it's too painful to even to talk about it. But I think you know of examples in your life, or the lives of people around you, where you watched the domino effect, the ripple effect, of the defilement or the contamination of sin. (36:44)

Not only that, let's look under this first point, the subpoint. Let's think about the external contamination. Let's think about the trouble it causes for us outside of the church. Not only does it defile many in the church, it causes defilement outside of the church. In a passage where Nathan confronts David about his sin with Bathsheba—remember that passage in 2 Samuel? Here comes Nathan, and one of the things he says, which was tucked away, unfortunately in some of the English translations, but some of them make it clear, where he comes and he says, "Here's one of the reasons God is not happy with what you've done." Here's what he says. It's because you have given cause for the Gentiles to blaspheme us. Right? In other words, let's kind of put it this way in our minds. We trash our reputation as the community of the redeemed. We trash our reputation as God's people. How many times? How many times has a non-Christian encountered the sin, or compromise, or the general expedience, of a Christian contractor? Or a Christian attorney? Or a Christian insurance person? And then all of a sudden his whole view of church and the Christians is defiled? It's contaminated. Just because of general godlessness. (37:56)

Or how about divorce and sexual immorality. You think that hurts the church? You think the outside looks at us and has a jaded view of us if we can't keep our marriages together? I think he does. I think the non-Christian goes whatever, those hypocrites. You heard that one before? That's not a new accusation is it? And I know we love to be cute; well there's room for one more, come and join us, we're all sinners saved by grace. Bottom line is, God is looking for a holy people, isn't he? Doesn't he want us to live differently than the rest of the world? So stop it with all these lame excuses about well, we're just one beggar trying to show another beggar where to find bread. What are you talking about? Right? We should be clothed in the righteousness of Christ. Are we perfect? No, we're not perfect. But boy, we're sure working to be more like the Perfect One. The perfect son of God. Let's keep our marriages together, right? Let's not be sexually immoral. Let's stop it with the bitter attitude. Let's stop it with the expedience of wanting what we want when we want it. Let's be self-controlled and godly in the present world, waiting for the blessed hope. That would be a good thing. And let's be distinctive as a community of believers. Fear the consequences of ongoing sin. It's hurts the church. It hurts us internally, contaminates us internally. But contradictions also trash our reputations outside the church. (39:11)

I want to take you to another passage on this one. Can I do that? Well I got the microphone, so I'm going to do it. 1 Peter 2. This one drives it home; it's a great passage. Because we're already up against it with non-Christians, aren't we? I mean, the world already is looking for a reason to not embrace us or our message, right? They're fighting us in their hearts. They suppress, according to Romans, they suppress the truth in unrighteousness. I mean it's a high hurdle for us, a steep road. 1 Peter 2:12. We've got it a double effort here to keep our reputation intact, live such good lives among the pagans, "that though they accuse of doing wrong"—and they're always looking for something, right?—"they may see your good deed." They won't find wrong. They'll see good things. "And they're glorify God on the day he visits us." And I don't know if that's in vindication, in that they're lost anyway but they're, well, "I guess they were godly after all," or whether it's the fact that our good deeds lead them to repentance, but either way it's a good thing. And the Bible says redouble your efforts. Live such good lives among these onlookers, that even though they

accuse you of doing wrong, they'll see your good deeds, and one day they'll change their perspective about you. (40:28)

Look at verse 15. After some specific instructions about how to deal with the government, he says in verse 15, "For it is God's will that by doing good you should silence the ignorant talk of foolish men." And here's the deal. They're all out there telling us we're a bunch of fools, and hypocrites, and we're no different from the rest of the world. Well, can we do good? Keep our marriages together? Stop with the bitter attitudes? Stop with the backbiting and the general godlessness so that, ultimately, we can silence their talk? I'd like that to be silenced. And then we hide behind these false perceptions of grace and think we've got license to do wrong, we don't. Let's make every effort to be holy. (41:08)

Fear the consequences of ongoing sin. Letter A, the church is hurt. But the worse thing—we've already touched on this, but let's look at it from a more personal perspective. We'll be surrounded with people like Esau. Esau. I mean, we'll have people in our lives that we sit next to in church, and if there's unchecked sin in their lives, or maybe us ourselves, we will really be church-goers that aren't saved. Letter B, let's put it that way. Here's the real tragedy: church-goers that aren't saved. People that sit there listening to these sermons week after week, and they're not even Christians. Does that not take us back to Matthew 7? Dare I have to read that one more time? I mean, he says, "Depart from me. I never knew you." Oh, but wait a minute, we sat through all that Kentucky Fried Chicken on Thursday nights and listened to endless sermons about end times—come on! Let us in. No. Depart from me, I never knew you, you who practice lawlessness. You never got sin in—it wasn't even a battle in your life. You proved that your justification wasn't real because you never made serious efforts at sanctification. (42:09)

James 1:22 says, "Don't merely listen to the word and so deceive yourself." The problem is that we can sit through church, as I once said in a sermon, the hazards of church are that we get more and more deceived because we know a lot. You know, we figure out, "Well I know something about the Daniel 9 prophecy and I can tell you about eschatology," or "I know something about the books of the Bible or biblical history," but we're never in our hearts transformed. And the Bible says that's a deceiving place to be. And if this sounds like old hat, I just want to quote Philippians 3:1. I know you've heard me preach on this many times, but as Paul said, it's no trouble for me to do it again and to say it again, and to write it again. But it's a safeguard for you. Check yourself to see if you're of the faith. Examine your life. (42:56)

And by the way, look at the text again. It's not just your life you should be concerned with. Back to Hebrews 12. Make every effort to live in peace. Now we don't see this as clearly in English, but here is a clear second person, plural imperative. Y'all check yourself, make sure you're working hard to be godly people. Make every effort all of you. OK? That seems very individualistic. I know it's to a group, but it hits us in the chest. That's not what happens in the next two verses. Verse 15 starts with a different kind of verb. He doesn't say, you know, check yourself. He says in verse 15, "See to it that no one misses the grace of God." It's repeated in our English text in verse 16: "And see to it that no one is sexually immoral." Do you see how that takes the finger and kind of takes it not just from—it changes the perspective. It's not just pointing at my chest, it's pointing at me and those around me. And it's saying, "Hey. You ought to look around you. See to it that no one is sexually immoral." (43:54)

Let's make an uncomfortable sermon even more uncomfortable. Are you ready for this? Number 3 on your outline. We need to evaluate ourselves. Evaluate yourself, and, capital A-N-D, care about other people. And that means that when you see someone who is bitter, when you see someone that is sexually immoral, when you see some professing believer who is generally godless in his decisions, you need to confront them. The word here, and it's even stronger than our English text translated. Some of you are familiar with this word, *episcopas* (44:29) You've heard that one before? *Episcopas*. The noun, we get the words Episcopal church from that. *episcopas* is one of

three words in the Greek new testament for the pastor. *Episcopas*. It's translated in the old translations as bishop. It's translated in our modern translations, the overseer. *Episcopas*. This is one of two times that word shows up as a verb, right? And it's not, "you overseers," it's "you should be overseeing." And guess what? It's not addressed to pastors. Because I know what a lot of you are thinking. Isn't that the pastor's job? He sees someone in sin in the church, he can take care of it. Here's the deal. If someone is engaged in sexual immorality in this church right now, you're going to know about it before I do. Did you know that? You will learn about it before anybody on staff ever hears a whiff of it. And the Bible says that we should all be looking out for each other. *Episcopao*. We should be looking out. We should be overseeing. We should be seeing to it that those around us, not only ourselves, aren't bitter—three examples in our text—aren't sexually immoral, and aren't godless. (45:38)

"Whew! I don't want to be the Holy Spirit in somebody's life, you know? I don't wanna—I don't want to be the salvation police. I'm not my brother's keeper." Remember what God thought of the last guy that said that, right? That's not a good answer. You are your brother's keeper. You should care about those around you. And when you get a whiff of sexual immorality, or bitterness, or general godlessness in someone's life, don't just pick up the phone and call the pastors, right? You need to be seeing to it that that's not happening in your circle of influence. (46:12)

Aww! That's gonna be tough. I might—they might not like me after that. They might not. But it isn't about being liked. This isn't a passage on, you know, how to be popular in your social circles. This is a passage about being passionate about God's calling on our lives to be holy community. And it's time for us to say I'm going to be enough when I see someone in sin to step out and say, "Hey, I know that I'm not perfect, I know maybe my life isn't perfect, but I can tell you, I just know that's not what God wants you to be doing. And maybe we can sit down and talk about it. Maybe we can help each other, and maybe I can help you." See to it that no one misses the grace of God. See to it that no one is sexually immoral. See to it that no one is godless. (46:59)

Let me drive this home with one quick passage in Galatians 6. Galatians 6. And I know sometimes we see this word in Galatians 6:1, "caught," and we think that's a scandal. That's a big scandal. When someone's caught in a scandal. That just means the concept that it's been revealed. You learn about it. Galatians 6:1. "Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin"—if you see bitterness, if you see a hint of sexual immorality, if you see godlessness—"you who are spiritual"—and that doesn't mean that you have to perfect to do this; this just means that you're not trapped in the same thing, right? "You who are spiritual should restore him." Do it gently though. And again there are some people that really like this point. Oh, great, I get to go and police other people's lives. If you like this point, it's probably not for you, 'kay? If you're reluctant about this point, then it is for you. Then God is trying to remind you that when you see someone in a sin you need to go and you need to restore the person gently, but watch yourselves. Because you might be tempted too. So be careful how you engage in this. Carry one another's burdens, and in this way you fulfill the law of Christ. (48:08)

What's that all about? Here's the deal. We like to think about our Christian life in a very autonomous, individualistic way. I'm just going to worry about myself. I can't care about those people in my small group. I mean, just, I don't know, it's just between them and God. When you hear yourself saying that to yourself, just recognize, that isn't the law of Christ. Christ didn't come to please to himself. He didn't come to serve himself. The concept of the law of Christ is to care for other people, and when you see someone displaying symptoms of these kinds of sins, you got to get involved. Carry their burdens. Watch out. Do it gently. Watch yourself, you could be tempted. And you know what? Don't care enough—and I use the word care advisedly—care. Don't we care enough to do this? What if the person you're sitting next to right now in church ends up in the lake of fire? Let's think that one through for a second. Do you care about that, or are you just worried about yourself. You don't want to be holy spirit for anybody else. Just all about you. Right? All that

guidance, that's between them and God. Don't you care? Seriously. Don't you care if your spouse is really saved? Don't you care if your friend in your small group is really going to heaven? Don't you care about that? Let's care enough to say I got to get involved. When I see contradictions I want to get involved. And I know that's scary for some of us because we don't want anybody pointing out our contradictions. Get over that. Right? I don't know what to do there. There is no Christianity that's just for individuals. This is a group deal. You realize that. (49:30)

Paul said the same kind of thing. 2 Corinthians 5. He says, "Knowing then what it is to fear the Lord, we persuade men." And it started with this verse: "We must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ." The person you're sitting next to right now will have to appear before God, the almighty God, and his judge Jesus Christ, and have to give an account for his life of all the deeds done in their body whether good or bad. That's what the Bible says. Do you care enough to try and mitigate the problem of that day for your friend? Let's get involved. Let's help these folks. Evaluate yourself and care about others. See to it that no one misses the grace of God. See to it that no one is sexually immoral. (50:07)

One last passage. Hebrews 4. Here's the problem. I know a lot of people look at this and go, "Wow. It's that serious? It's that important? I don't think I can do it. It's too hard." Just remember this: you're not on your own. It's a lot like me going home this afternoon and, you know, I'm going to go to a house that's a mess, right? There's boxes, I can't find a bunch of stuff, it's disheveled, it's a mess. And here's the deal. And I hate to analogize my wife as the Holy Spirit, but—she would like that even less, but—you know, I have a helper and she's great at this. And so, I'm not doing this alone. As a matter of fact, sometimes I go home and it's like, wow! Look what you've done! And then it's like, OK, help me with this. And we get to work together to make this thing happen. And we're willing to go through the discomfort of it because we need a house that functions right. I've got a helper. It's no mistake that in the Scriptures that the Holy Spirit is called our *parakletos*, our helper. He has not left us to our own devices to try and become sanctified. He's got help for us. (51:10)

Hebrews 4, in verse 11, he's got the same kind of verbiage. Make every effort to enter into that rest. The picture here was the promised land. See to it that no one falls by following the example of disobedience of those people in the desert. Don't do that. Then he talks about the word of God. It judges the thoughts and attitudes of our heart. He talks about accountability in verse 13, that we're going to stand before the judgment seat of God, that we'll give an account to him. And then it says in verse 14, "Hold firmly to the faith that we profess, but"—verse 15, here's the deal. We've got a high priest who sympathizes with us. He sympathizes with our weakness. He knows that we're weak. It's not an excuse to indulge in sin, but he's sympathetic. We have one who's been tempted in every way just as we are yet without sin. Let us then—here's the most important verse in this section—approach the throne of grace with confidence so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need. Not only do we have each other to kind of help ourselves grow, we've got the Holy Spirit. If you're a real Christian, that's a relationship that the Bible says is so close it is spatially defined as not being with you, he's in you. That's a big deal. And the point is, when you say, "Wow, my life is kind of a mess and I got a long way to go to be Christ-like," that's fine. Boxes everywhere, a disheveled house, fine. You've got a helper. And he is great at rearranging your life. He just wants you to take it seriously and make every effort to be holy. If you do that, the Holy Spirit says great, I am ready to not only sympathize with your weakness, but to give you mercy and grace in your time of need. God wants to help. He can pull your life together. (52:52)

Let's pray together and I'll let you go. God, help us, please. We build the base here to understand your promises. I know, like I mentioned at the outset, it is like standing at the terminal in LAX, in those old round terminals and, you know, what we decide about some of these interpretive decisions are going to make all the difference in the world as to where our eschatology



ends up. But I pray as we said last week that all of this would be approached with humility. I know we're all trying to be consistent with our understanding of how to interpret Scripture. But I pray, God, that as we go down these corridors and try and get comfortable with a particular brand of eschatology, that we would be gracious and kind knowing that the issues about pre-tribulationism, and mid-trib, and A-Mill and Post-Mill, a lot of these things are fringe issues in the Christian life. I know that many people claim them to be just catastrophic divergence from one field or post to another because of their decisions about hermeneutics and how they interpret Scripture, but I pray we would be a gracious congregation. I pray that we would be kind, that we would be recognizing that just because we've studied this for a couple hundred hours that maybe we have some room to adjust our thinking and our ideas about this. And I pray ultimately that we would trust you, that we would focus as we said last week, that we'd major on the majors, and that we would have some understanding of the particulars and we would understand divergent views with a sense of grace and love for each other. So help us through these things God, I pray, as we continue to study and look at the implications for the future. In Jesus' name. Amen.