

## 31. The reason for losing

August 2, 2015

I don't know much about football and all of its terms, like a birdie, eagle, slam dunk, etc. Just kidding. Let's say that there is a play-off football game for two arch rival teams. At the beginning, everyone thought that it would be a very tight game, but for some unknown reason, one team's players are doing everything wrong – they fumble the ball; the offensive team members get tackled every time they try to run the ball; their ball gets intercepted; the quarterback is getting sacked three times in a row; to make the matter all worse, their own running back even make a touch down in their own end zone. Thank, God, finally a half time bell goes off.

Can you guess what kind of conversations are going on in their locker room? Do you think that the head coach would tell them to just carry on as it was? Or do you think that he points out what kind of things they were doing wrong in the field?

The original readers of this open letter, the first century Hebrew Christians, were losing their hearts under the severe persecutions. So, the author of this letter told them why they should continue in their faith in Jesus Christ through explanation of theologies and examples from the OT in the last 11 chapters systematically. And now in this chapter 12, he becomes much more practical.

What we are about to study this morning is a lot like what we would hear from the coach in the locker room during the half time. The reason for losing is that they were discouraged and their hearts were not in the game. Some even were considering departing from the faith in the Lord and going back to Judaism. Additionally, their walk with Christ was hindered by some of the worldliness in their parts. I believe that the Lord will teach us how to stay in the fight, and not give a reason to lose to satan.

### A. BACK IN THE RACE

*Hebrews 12:12-13 Therefore strengthen the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees, 13 and make straight paths for your feet, so that what is lame may not be dislocated, but rather be healed.*

Let's quickly recap what we learned last two weeks. In v1, the author exhorts us to run with endurance. In v2, he points our eyes and draws our attention to the Lord Jesus and tells us to fix our eyes on Him while we are running. In v3, he reminds us of the race that Jesus ran ahead of us so that we don't grow weary. From 4 through 11, he tells us to endure God's loving chastening. Now in v12-13, the author inspires us to get back in the race.

While I was preparing this portion, I couldn't help myself but thinking about drill instructors screaming at a recruit to make him be a soldier. Those drill instructors made men out of boys, fighters out of lazy worthless slobs. It goes the same for the spiritual arena. Whether you'd like to admit it or not, you are in for a long fight as long as you live in this world. The world and satan want to drag us back to where we came from. If we continue to have our hands hang down and feeble knees, we will be taken out by them in no time.

### B. PURSUE PEACE

*Hebrews 12:14 Pursue peace with all people, and holiness, without which no one will see the Lord:*

We see two things we need to do here:

### **1) Pursue peace with all people**

Apostle Paul explains this in more detail in the Book of Romans ch. 12:

*Romans 12:18 If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men.*

Treat others as you want to be treated. Be nice to others, especially on the road. Just because someone cuts you off, it doesn't mean that you should retaliate him back in the same way.

When it comes to insult, our Lord, through the apostle Paul, is telling us not to revenge ourselves. Because in the majority of cases nobody dies from insult or even a slap on a cheek. Our Lord will take care of it later. He does a whole lot better job than we can possibly do.

Grant that not everyone wants to live in peace. Some are just impossible to make peace with, no matter how hard you try. After you extend your peace as best as you can, if they still refuse, then it is not your problem anymore.

One of British preacher Charles Spurgeon's congregation told his preacher, "I never forgive." In response to him, Spurgeon said, "I hope you never sin." Remember, as followers of Christ, forgiveness is mandatory for all of us, but reconciliation depends on the situation.

### **2) Pursue holiness**

The Greek word for 'holiness' here is "hagiasmos" and its literal translation is "consecration, purification, sanctification of heart and life". If you have a NASB version, it says, "sanctification" which is the best rendering for us to understand.

Then, you may wonder, "What do you mean that 'sanctification' is the best rendering for us to understand"? To be precise, 'holiness' is a goal for us to achieve through the power of the Holy Spirit, but 'sanctification' is a process for us to maintain through the power of the Holy Spirit.

If I speak in plain English, sanctification means we should be set apart for God in our daily lives – in everything we do, speak, and even think. It's a tall order for sinners like us, ain't it? Can we do it in our own? Not in a million years. Then how can we do it? By the guidance and power of the Holy Spirit who lives in us. I know what you are thinking. There is a mind-boggling question in the back of your mind – "Set apart from what?" Worldliness.

Then, another question arises – "What is 'worldliness'"? It is a mentality that discounts and denies Christ as Lord.

*1 John 2:15-17 Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. 16 For all that is in the world--the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life--is not of the Father but is of the world. 17 And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever.*

The essence of the worldliness is an attitude of the heart. I am sure that you all remember Lot's wife in Genesis. Two angels were dispatched from heaven by the Lord Jesus to rescue Lot's family from the upcoming wrath of God against the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah. As they were leaving the city, she turned around and looked at the city with a set of longing eyes even though she was warned not to look

back previously. That's worldliness. Mrs. Lot had an attitude of the heart for desiring the things that enticed the lust of her flesh, the lust of her eyes, and the pride of her life. These things and the worldly attitude compete against the Holy Spirit in our hearts if we don't set ourselves apart from these things.

Worldliness is not limited to any particular class of people or time. It is readily available to anyone, from mature believers to new born-again believers. It is not necessarily an external thing, though it eventually comes out from the inside. It is dangerous, because of its infiltrating influence. It goes into our brains, it fans our ego, and convinces us that we can handle a little compromise by the way we think and affects the decisions we make. It is slow, subtle, and methodical.

When we are morally separate from the values of the world, and when we operate by means that are different from theirs, we will stand out from them like daylight from darkness.

*Philippians 2:14-15 Do all things without complaining and disputing, 15 that you may become blameless and harmless, children of God without fault in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world*

### **C. THREE WARNINGS**

*Hebrews 12:15-17 looking carefully lest anyone fall short of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up cause trouble, and by this many become defiled; 16 lest there be any fornicator or profane person like Esau, who for one morsel of food sold his birthright. 17 For you know that afterward, when he wanted to inherit the blessing, he was rejected, for he found no place for repentance, though he sought it diligently with tears.*

The author of the Book of Hebrews gives us three warnings if we dabble into the worldliness, not set apart ourselves for the Lord:

#### **1) Don't let anyone come short of grace.**

If we somehow think that we have to be cool like the unbelievers in the world, or if we think that we have to live by the rigid requirements of our own self-made guidelines, we are shortchanging ourselves from the wonderful grace of our God. It is a life that's free, ruled only by one law – the law of love, written not on hard religious tablets, but on the soft, inner part of our heart.

#### **2) Don't let any root of bitterness start in your heart**

If you have gone through a divorce or been wronged falsely by someone, you know that it is very easy to have bitterness in your heart. Bitterness is very subtle and strong. It thrives in your anger toward the person; it fans the hatred for that person in your heart; it eventually builds a prison inside of your heart and traps you in. Guess who has the key to get out of that prison. You. Forgive that person as much as you were forgiven by the Lord.

*Ephesians 4:26 "Be angry, and do not sin": do not let the sun go down on your wrath, 27 nor give place to the devil.*

Bitterness corrupts many, rooted in a sense of personal hurt, and many hold on to the bitterness with amazing stubbornness. What they must do is remember the grace of God extended to them, and start extending that grace towards others – loving the undeserving.

### 3) Don't let yourself be like Esau.

Who is Esau? He was a twin brother of the conniving Jacob. Though he was the first born of their father Isaac, the Lord set the birthright for the younger son Jacob. Isaac who favored his oldest wanted to give the birthright to Esau against the Lord's will.

You know the story that was written Genesis 25:

*Genesis 25:29-34 Now Jacob cooked a stew; and Esau came in from the field, and he was weary. 30 And Esau said to Jacob, "Please feed me with that same red stew, for I am weary." Therefore his name was called Edom. 31 But Jacob said, "Sell me your birthright as of this day." 32 And Esau said, "Look, I am about to die; so what is this birthright to me?" 33 Then Jacob said, "Swear to me as of this day." So he swore to him, and sold his birthright to Jacob. 34 And Jacob gave Esau bread and stew of lentils; then he ate and drank, arose, and went his way. Thus Esau despised his birthright.*

Did you notice Esau's idea about his birthright? He not only didn't care about it, he also despised it. To him, it was only worth a measly bowl of soup. Why? Because Esau was a worldly person.

You might be like Esau now. You came to the church this morning to appease your religious conscience. While you are sitting in your seat, your thoughts are very worldly. Following the Lord with all of your heart is the last thing in your mind. Because you don't see God here, right now, and your life seems to be going well without Him. You feel that if you need Him, you will call Him, but not now. If that is your mindset, you are shortchanging your spiritual birthright for a measly bowl of worldliness. Why would you do that?

Look what happened to Esau. Later, when he got half of his senses back, though he begged his daddy with tears, it was too late. God's grace does not fail, but we can fail to depend on God's grace. Esau is a warning to us not to live for lesser things. While you still have a breath in your lungs, repent, not remorse. Turn away from your sins.

Now let me talk to those who do not know Jesus Christ as your personal Savior and Lord. Did you notice in v17, it says, "*he found no place for repentance.*" What does it mean? It means that there is a place of no return where you can truly repent your sins and accept Christ into your heart. Yes, physically, you have that chance until your last breath, but spiritually, your heart might be too hard to repent.

Know this: there is a point of no return. You might say to yourself, "I will get right with God one of these days, one of these months. Someday, far from now, I will ask Christ to come into my life." But every time you reject God's call on your life, every time you come under the conviction of the Holy Spirit, realizing your need for Jesus, and you say, "No," your heart will get more calloused. It gets tougher. It gets harder. And if you continue to resist the Holy Spirit and harden your heart, there can come a point in your life where you won't want God's forgiveness at all. Don't let today be another day of rejection, because this might be your last rejection before no return. I will show you how to come to Christ right after I give the applications.

## D. APPLICATIONS

1) Before you compromise with the next step of the worldliness, think about Jesus who died for your sins.

Look at His bloody and swollen face from the tortures through your mind's eyes. He went through the tortures and execution, because of you and me. Do you still want to compromise your walk with Christ for the measly bowl of the worldliness?

**2) Before you compromise with the next step of the worldliness, think about the consequences that your sins will bring to your loved ones.**

I am sure that the temptations you are facing are enticing, the sins you are about to commit are exciting. But for only a short season. Then, there will be horrible consequences not only for yourself, but also for everyone around you, the ones whom you love. Ask yourself, is it worth it?