**Preventing Roots of Bitterness**

*Hebrews 12:12-17*

**Introduction**

1. The church is profoundly described as a body (of Christ) which emphasizes the absolute necessity of every member, no matter their function (**cf. Romans 12:4-5).**
2. This comes with many implications, two of which are:
   1. We depend upon each other for spiritual strength and encouragement to get to heaven.
   2. Any single member can drastically affect the whole congregation by their choices for the better or worse.
3. For this reason, we are to be circumspect in our relationships with each other in the church so that we are all protected individually, and as a whole.
4. It is especially important that these concepts be understood and exercised appropriately when times are unusually difficult. The Hebrew writer addressed such times:
   1. Persecution – by Jewish countrymen toward those who turned to Christ.
   2. Discouragement – **Hebrews 12:3** – because of persecution.
   3. Ignorance of God’s role in such adversity – **Hebrews 12:5-6, 11** – chastening from a Father for our good.
5. Due to their circumstances, the writer urged them to draw together and strengthen each other lest there be any spiritual loss in the congregation – **Hebrews 12:12-13**
   1. **(v. 12)** – strengthen those who are weak and discouraged by this persecution.
   2. **(v. 13)** – make straight paths for them (in the mind, especially concerning God’s will and purpose for this adversity) so they will grow in faith rather than falter.
6. He follows the general admonition of **(vv. 12-13)** with the specific matters of pursuit to accomplish such **(v. 14),** and the specific vigilance to avoid a threefold description of apostasy **(vv. 15-17).**
7. We, too, must realize our duties one toward another within the local church, and make sure we’re doing as the Lord requires to prevent any one of us from falling away, and affecting others in the process.
8. What We Pursue – Peace and Holiness
9. These two matters specified are necessary to avoid the matters of the following verses – viz. individual members falling away and dragging others along with them.
10. Peace
    1. Peace among the people of God despite their diverse backgrounds manifests the power of God, and brings Him glory – **Ephesians 2:14** (especially impressive with Jew and Gentile)
       1. Glory to God – **Ephesians 3:21**
    2. This peace is the bond which promotes unity – **Ephesians 4:1-3**
       1. Unity in the Spirit – united in the teachings of the Spirit.
       2. However, factors exist that threaten this unity beyond differences in the teaching of the Spirit:
          1. Liberties, rivalries, party spirit, jealousies, bitterness, etc.
          2. **(v. 2)** – these qualities – along with the direction of the Spirit – provide for such peace and unity.
    3. External adversity can lead to internal discord if not careful – **James 5:9; Galatians 5:15**
11. Holiness
    1. It is possible for brethren to be at peace with one another but be erring concerning the word of God.
    2. Peace should be one of the promoters of holiness.
       1. ***“Without which no one will see the Lord”*** – peace is only one factor necessary to please God, but holiness is an all-inclusive factor.
       2. **Matthew 5:8** – pure in heart will see God.
    3. SO, PEACE IS NOT TO BE SOUGHT TO THE NEGLECT OF HOLINESS – **Romans 12:18** (speaking of relationships outside the church, but is applicable with brethren)
       1. Some avoid confronting sin for fear of conflict.
       2. Our attitude in confronting sin can maintain the peace – **Galatians 6:1-2**
    4. **1 Peter 1:15-16** – to be holy as God is holy.
       1. Sin is never to be tolerated, but always to be dealt with.
12. The pursuit of peace and holiness within the church is broken down into the vigilance required among brethren for the prevention of 3 specified matters which would jeopardize peace and holiness.
13. What We Seek to Prevent
14. NOTE: ***“looking carefully”*** – i.e. keeping our eyes peeled, and always searching for red flags among the faith of our brethren – be involved in each other’s spiritual journeys.
15. Anyone Falling Short of the Grace of God
    1. This is tantamount to the loss of the Israelites illustrated earlier in the epistle – **Hebrews 3:16-4:2** – they missed out on the promised land.
    2. Contrary to popular religious thought it is possible to lose our salvation.
       1. The epistle is written to brethren and contains the warning against apostasy – **Hebrews 3:12-14** (ultimate partaking with Christ is through ***“holding fast”***)
    3. Context – they could fall short of God’s grace if they did not view and approach the persecution properly.
       1. **Hebrews 12:11-13** – It can produce righteousness/holiness or destroy them.
    4. Description of those who have salvation only to lose it – **2 Peter 2:20-22**
       1. We want to prevent this sad state for each other.
16. Any Root of Bitterness Springing Up Causing Trouble and Defiling Many
    1. Language in allusion to an Old Testament passage – **Deuteronomy 29:14-19**
       1. Context – renewing the covenant God made with Israel at Horeb (Mt. Sinai) with generation going to receive the land.
       2. **(vv. 16-17)** – recollection of idolatry observed in Egypt.
       3. **(vv. 18-19)** – description warning against forsaking the Lord by turning to serve other gods.
       4. ***“and that there may not be among you a root bearing bitterness or wormwood”*** – descriptive of the one who has turned away from the Lord and does not truly serve Him any longer although he is still among the people of God.
    2. New Testament – Simon – **Acts 8:22-23** – poisoned bitterness, bound iniquity.
       1. Connection with sin ultimately.
    3. ***“springing up cause trouble, and by this many become defiled”*** – i.e. the sinfulness of one who has departed from God, but is still among His people reaches the surface, and affects others.
    4. We seek to prevent individual apostasy for the sake of the individual. However, AN INDIVIDUAL’S APOSTASY DOES NOT EXIST IN A VACUUM, BUT TOUCHES ALL IN THE CHURCH, AND HAS GREAT POTENTIAL TO DRAW OTHERS AWAY FROM GOD AS WELL.
       1. Peter’s hypocrisy – **Galatians 2:13**
       2. Error of apostate false teachers – **2 Peter 3:17**
17. Anyone Following After Esau by Being Profane and Unfaithful
    1. Such is further descriptive of the one who has (1) fallen from grace, (2) the root of bitterness that has affected others.
       1. It describes the ultimate tragedy of the choice to forsake God…
       2. …and also the eternal regret that it ends with.
    2. Esau – **Genesis 25:29-34** (sold birthright)
       1. Fornicator – spiritually, i.e. against God (**cf. James 4:4**)
       2. Profane – *bebēlo* – pert. to being worldly as opp. to having an interest in transcendent matters, totally worldly. (BDAG)
          1. Treating the holy as common.
          2. Thought his birthright as something of lesser significance than food.
    3. Afterward – regret, and vain attempt to reverse his decision **(v. 17).**
    4. What these people will be trading – **1 Peter 1:3-4; 1 John 2:15-17**
    5. What these people will feel for eternity – **Luke 16:24-25** (regret)
18. Preventing Roots of Bitterness
19. Know that One Can Affect the Many
    1. While we should have a great measure of care for each individual, it is the tendency of some to act as though one erring is inconsequential for the whole. This is not so.
    2. Achan – took some of the accursed things from Jericho.
       1. Failed to take Ai, a city far less significant than Jericho.
       2. **Joshua 7:20-21** – what Achan did.
       3. **Joshua 7:25** – what it caused – ***“Why have you troubled us?”***
    3. **1 Corinthians 5:6** – leaven leavens the whole. (Context – keeping the sexually immoral among them)
    4. **2 Timothy 2:16-18** – false teaching, spreads, overthrows faith of some.
    5. ***“and by this many become defiled”*** – that one who was unfaithful to God, still being among the brethren, is a danger to the whole as long as there is not repentance, thus change.
20. Know the Lord Requires Accountability
    1. It is not right to have the “it’s none of our business” mentality.
       1. The salvation of our brethren is our business.
       2. The purity of the church is our business.
    2. We are commanded to be actively attentive to the spiritual welfare of our brethren – **1 Thessalonians 5:14-15**
    3. ***“looking carefully”*** – *episkopeō* – to give attention to, look at, take care, see to it (BDAG)
       1. Same word used for elders – **1 Peter 5:2**
       2. Certainly, the oversight/authority of the elders is distinctive from the requirement for all of us to “look diligently” for each other.
       3. However, there is the similar idea.
    4. Daily exhortation – **Hebrews 3:13** – what is exhortation when sin is involved?
       1. May require admonition and correction.
       2. Exhortation with “doctrine, reproof, correction, and instruction in righteousness” (**2 Timothy 3:16**).
21. Know the Component of Love in Matters of Discipline
    1. Some neglect the duty to prevent others from turning away from the Lord in sin with the suggestion that such does not express love.
    2. Firstly, love is what God commands – **2 John 5-6**
    3. What does love do? – **1 Peter 4:8** – cover sins.
    4. When we look carefully in this regard, and approach brethren caught in sin in a spirit of gentleness (**cf. Galatians 6:1),** we must understand the great good that is accomplished – **James 5:19-20**

Conclusion

1. We must recognize our god given duty to each other as members of the church. WE are required to look after each other, and admonish and correct sin when needed. (**cf. Hebrews 12:12-13**)
2. It is naïve to think that one member continuing in sin will not affect the whole body. (If such is the mindset it already has been affected.)
3. Let us look out for each other, hold each other accountable, and help each other get to heaven.