

Run With Endurance 11

Hebrews 12:16-17

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Well, as always, it's good to see you here to worship together, to open God's Word together.

Please open in your Bibles to Hebrews chapter 12. Today, specifically, we're in verses 16 and 17 as we close out this section that we've been studying from verse 12 to 17. And as we begin, I want to invite you to consider one of God's most interesting creations this morning.

I want to talk for a moment about the anglerfish. If you don't know the anglerfish by name, you'll know it by its description. The anglerfish is the deep-sea fish that has the long stem coming from its head with a little light bulb at the end of the stem that it uses to take advantage of unsuspecting prey.

There in the depths of the ocean, that little light is against the backdrop of darkness, and it draws the attention of unsuspecting little fish that come over for investigation, only to find, through their horror, that behind that little light bulb is a big mouth full of sharp teeth.

You know, James describes sin and temptation much the same way. In James 1:14, he says: *"But each one is tempted when he's carried away and enticed by his own lust."*

Temptation is really a momentary opportunity presented to us, either externally or internally, to pursue a sinful thought or action that promises pleasure or gratification of some kind. That temptation often comes like a shiny object intended to capture our attention, to take us out of our context and focusing on anything around us but just that little tempting light. And the problem is, if you give in to that temptation, if you draw near to that tempting light, you will find the teeth of consequences are hiding behind that light bulb.

We can't be too careful. We can't be too cautious when it comes to the battle against sin. So how do we think rightly about the dangers of sin and how do we guard ourselves and help the church guard itself from sin's temptation? One of the places that we can begin is to analyze an example, an illustration in which, sadly, an individual did not resist temptation, and their life was ruined because of it.

Such an example will be laid before us this morning in the life of Esau. And as we consider his life, we will learn what led him there and in learning that, we pray, God willing, he will equip us not to follow in the footsteps of Esau and those like him.

Before we begin, let me just quickly remind us where we left off. The theme, of course, of Hebrews is **The Superiority of Christ**. We've seen that proven in the ways that are there on the screen before you. Since chapter 10, verse 19, we've been applying over and over again how this superior Jesus should affect our lives in daily living.

We'll do that again even this morning. We'll put the outline of chapter 12 there for you. I won't go through each one of those points because we've seen those several times.

But I do want to focus on these final three encouragements that ushered us into this section that we're in now and especially encouragement number three, **God's Discipline Produces Our Sanctification**. We've been talking about the pursuit of holiness and how God's gracious discipline in our lives to bring us through trials and difficulties is intended to help us to grow in holiness, as he says here, even to share in His holiness.

And so we're looking at chapter 12, verses 12-17, and applying all that we've learned in the first 11 verses of the chapter. So, one more time, let's read this section again together, beginning in verse 12:

"¹² Therefore, strengthen the hands that are weak and the knees that are feeble, ¹³ and make straight paths for your feet, so that the limb which is lame may not be put out of joint, but rather be healed. ¹⁴ Pursue peace with all men, and the sanctification without which no one will see the Lord. ¹⁵ See to it that no one comes short of the grace of God; that no root of bitterness springing up causes trouble, and by it many be defiled; ¹⁶ that there be no immoral or godless person like Esau, who sold his own birthright for a single meal. ¹⁷ For you know that even afterwards, when he desired to inherit the blessing, he was rejected, for he found no place for repentance, though he sought for it with tears."

The theme that we've outlined now for several weeks is this: **Understanding God's discipline strengthens us to take heart and run with endurance!** Remember what we have in these verses, verses 12 to 17 are three commands that then give us four responses to the gracious discipline of God. The first response is that we must **Take Heart**. Remember he said strengthen the hands that are weak. Take heart, preach truth to yourself.

Secondly, response number two, **Run Straight**. Make straight paths for your feet. We are to believe the truth and obey the truth and walk on the path of obedience.

The third command is the word **pursue** and out of that word we get the final two responses. **Pursue peace and pursue holiness**. We are to intentionally and proactively pursue peace in our relationships and in our relationship with God in the sense of pursuing holiness, growth and sanctification.

And as we begin to see last week, these are certainly things we're called to individually but there is a corporate responsibility, a concern that we ought to have to see the body of Christ as a whole grow in holiness and to come alongside as God gives us opportunity to lovingly spur one another on to love and good deeds.

Remember this church that's being written to here in Hebrews is weary, they're struggling in their faith and those kinds of seasons in life are very dangerous, very tempting for people to be weary in their faith and to begin to look across the aisle and to walk off the path of obedience and chase after sin.

So he's calling us to a united pursuit of corporate holiness. The church must encourage one another in these things and one of the ways we do that he says is to watch out for the common dangers that can harm the holiness of the church.

Last week we saw the first two, there are three in this passage. Today we'll be looking at the third but just quickly the first danger was what we called **The Drifter**. He says we've got to be seeing to it that no one comes short of the grace of God, that no one drifts away from the truth.

Secondly, we saw **The Defiler**, that's danger number two. He quoted a section from Deuteronomy 29:18 here in verse 15: *¹⁵ See(ing) to it that no one comes short of the grace of God; that no root of bitterness springing up causes trouble, and by it many be defiled;* Just that last portion of the verse.

Remember these dangers as I mentioned last week are progressively getting worse. In the first example, you just have an individual who is tempted to take his eyes off the end goal and to drift away. In this second danger, he's now hardened his heart and he's whispering in the ears of others in the congregation seeking to draw them away as well.

And now what we have in this third danger is the end result of a person who has come short of God's grace. Danger number three is what we'll call The Defiled. The drifter, the defiler, now the defiled.

Look back at verse 16, it begins with the word "that". As I showed you last week, that's the clue that we now have a unique third danger but all of these connect back up to that participle in verse 15, "seeing to it that". So in 16 here, we have *"seeing to it that there be no immoral or godless person."*

This is the danger. These two words, an immoral and godless person. Esau's going to function as the example of a person that's given in to these things, but the danger we're to keep ourselves from is falling into this trap of immorality and godlessness.

This is the terrible end of a person who has come short of the grace of God. A person whose character has been corrupted. A person who lives his or her life chasing the deceptive light of temptation and sin as it dangles there in the darkness.

Now specifically, to understand this danger and to be on guard against it in our own hearts and in the church corporately, we need to take these two words individually and make sure we understand what's being referred to. The first word is the word "immoral". The Greek word is used specifically to refer to a person who practices sexual immorality.

Sometimes it's actually used in a technical sense in certain contexts and it's there translated as fornicator. But here it's used in a more general sense to refer to a person who's pursuing sexual immorality in general. You'll actually recognize the Greek term here. It's the word *pornos* in Greek which is where, yes, we get our word pornography from. It finds its origin in this word.

So the meaning in context is that as we pursue peace and sanctification, we're to be on guard against sexual immorality in our own hearts and in the church as a whole.

Now why single out sexual immorality of all the sins that he could have chosen? It's because this is a sin that's pervasive and it's captured every single culture on the planet since the fall. Sexual immorality did not begin in the 1960s and 70s. It did not begin with the invention of the internet.

All that we've done in these modern decades is find new pathways to the same old sins that have captured and destroyed many lives since the fall. And we ought to be very careful not to think too lightly of sexual sin. It's possible to do that because it's so common. It's so pervasive that it's easy to think too lightly of sexual sin when the scriptures repeatedly warn us it is a deadly danger that will destroy you. It destroys homes. It is infectious in the church.

In 1 Thessalonians 4, verse 3, Paul says: *³For this is the will of God, your sanctification;* Now, sanctification is a holistic term of all the areas in our life in which we ought to grow in holiness. And yet, what is the one sin he then singles out? He singles out right after that: *"that is, that you abstain from sexual immorality;"*

That is not to say that the sum total of our holiness is only in the battle for purity. It is to say this is a key battle in the Christian life that we must win. So, Northlake Bible Church, this is a call for each of us sitting here this morning to flee from sexual immorality individually, and as a church, to rid it from our hearts, to rid it from our congregation.

And if we're going to do this effectively, it's going to mean some practical things. First of all, it's going to mean that we have to talk about it. Don't believe the lie that this is a subject that's so taboo that it cannot and should not be discussed.

Parents, talk to your kids about the dangers of sexual sin. Not only that, though, don't just teach them sexual sin is bad, stay away from it. Teach them of the gospel, and that the gospel can forgive us for sexual sin, and not only that, but empower us not to be enslaved to sexual sin.

We've talked about how the drift to come short of the grace of God begins with believing lies. And one of the most pervasive lies that Christians believe is that the sin they're struggling with is so difficult, it's so hard, it's just impossible to win the battle.

Sexual sin, this is one of those sins where that lie is pervasive, where people sit before me, downcast, believing they are trapped hopelessly in this sin. Let me tell you, if you're in Christ, you are not. Young people, listen to me. You do not have to be sexually immoral. It doesn't matter what our culture says. It doesn't matter what's on the internet. You do not have to, if you're in Christ, you do not have to be immoral. Don't believe the lie that this is a sin that cannot be conquered.

This text says, see to it that there's no immoral person among you. And God equips us for the things He commands. He gives us victory over sin. You don't have to live another day trapped in immorality. It is not a struggle that's unique. You are not alone. You are not beyond help. This is a sin that Christ can free you from if you cling to Him.

It begins, though, by refusing to believe the lie that it'd be better just to keep it to ourselves. After all, if I told anybody what I'm really dealing with, it would hurt the people around me, and so it's better just not to tell them. Understand that, too, is a lie. What is hurting the people that love you is your secret life of sin. Confess it. Bring it into the open. And let God bring not only forgiveness, but healing into your life so that you can kill it with a vengeance.

But, church, sexual sin is to have no place in the church, in our own lives, in our own hearts, and in the lives of the church as a whole. It is common, but don't think for a moment that it's not deadly. It's destructive, and it must not be tolerated. See to it that there be no immoral person among you.

But there's a second word that's encapsulated in this danger, and this is an even more extensive word than the word immoral. He says, seeing to it that there be no immoral or *godless* person among you. The word godless can also be translated as worldly. It's a really interesting Greek word. Here's the definition of the term itself. **Godlessness**-is pertaining to being worldly as opposed to having an interest in transcendent matters. One translation could be totally worldly.

So to be godless or worldly in the sense of the term here refers to a person who is completely captivated by temporal things. A person who does not have interest in the eternal. And therefore, this is a person who becomes extremely short-sighted.

A worldly person is a short-sighted person because their whole life is geared towards temporal success, temporal satisfaction, and temporal gratification. And the godless person refuses to bring God into the picture in their life, ensuring that His word is intentionally suppressed so that they have no influence on their personal decisions or their pursuits.

After all, why do you think that atheists often get so angry when you bring up God? Why do people who are given over to a very flagrant, sinful, open lifestyle get so angry and offended when you bring up God and the standards of His Word? Why does it bother them if they don't believe in God or they don't really care what He says? It's because the godless person, honestly, is not unaware of God's existence.

And because of the conscience that God has put in all of us, they're not even unaware of God's standards, at least in part. And they don't want God to rule over them. That is the issue. The worldly person, the godless person, is what Paul refers to in Romans 1:18:

"¹⁸ For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness,"

Not that don't know any of the truth. They suppress the truth they know. Now, we have to deal with the fact that we as believers also live in the temporal world. It is not God's will, clearly stated in Scripture. It is not God's will to remove us immediately from the temporal world upon conversion. Jesus says this in his high priestly prayer in John 17, 14-17. He says:

"¹⁴ I have given them Your word; and the world has hated them, because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. (Verse 15) ¹⁵ I do not ask You to take them out of the

world, but to keep them from the evil one. ¹⁶ They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. ¹⁷ Sanctify them in the truth; Your word is truth."

So this is where we get the idea that we as believers are to be in the world but not of the world. Or another way to say that is we are to be in the world but not be worldly. What does that mean? Well, it's an issue of character and it's an issue of perspective. In the one sense, to not be of the world is to be moral in our character, to obey the written word of God, to live in a way that pleases Him.

But it also is a matter of perspective. To be in the world but not of the world changes the way we view everything around us, every temporal thing that God allows us to have or interact with in this world is changed in the way we view that thing when we are in the world but not of the world.

And I mention this because many believers are confused when it comes to this concept. It's why some have wrongly chosen, for example, to sell all their possessions and to kind of get off the grid in some monastery as if God requires us to get rid of any temporal thing in order to truly be godly. That's not what God says. We are to live in this temporal world which means we have to interact and even use and even enjoy the good temporal gifts that God gives.

Believers, for example, have to buy food and we have to buy clothes and houses and cars and other temporal things both out of necessity and even, yes, to enjoy these things in our temporal life.

So here's the big question. What's the difference between having temporal things and being worldly? How do we walk that line? Well, God calls us to have an eternal perspective that shapes the way we view all the temporal things in our lives. So our hearts are never to be set on temporal things as if attaining temporal things is the purpose of life. It is not.

And temporal things are not to be seen as an end unto themselves. For the Christian, every temporal thing that God gives us has a connection to an eternal reality that shapes the way we view that temporal thing.

Our eternal lens, that's what's opposite of the godless person. The godless person has a temporal lens. They see all temporal things only in that context. The godly person, by God's grace now, has a different perspective, an eternal lens through which they view all temporal things.

So for the Christian, the temporal goods that God gives us, both for our needs to be met and even for our enjoyment, they become an avenue for things like this: They become an avenue to give thanks and praise to God. They become an avenue to accomplish God's mandate to rule over the world and to cultivate it and steward it. They become an avenue to care for the physical needs of those that God places under our care. They become an avenue to enjoy life as a gift from God. They become an avenue to serve God by sharing what we have to bless others. They become an avenue to serve the church and expand His kingdom. They become an avenue to provide opportunities to share the gospel with others and finally to care for the physical needs of those who've fallen on difficult times.

So you see, believers are not commanded to take a vow of poverty. We're commanded to be good stewards of all that God has given us which means every relationship, every talent, every object, every dollar, every moment of time He gives to us is to be used as a means to glorify God and enjoy Him forever. This is the picture, the perspective that shapes how we interact with all things in this world.

But the worldly person that's warned about here in Hebrews 12 has no appetite for eternal things. And so the world and its people and its goods are there for personal gain and personal satisfaction. That's the godless mindset.

So before we move on, let me just stop for a second and let's take a moment to test our hearts as it relates to these two words, immoral and godless.

Are you harboring or justifying sexual sin in your life? Are you fervently committed to killing sexual sin in your thoughts, in your words, and in your actions? How much is your pursuit and use of God's temporal gifts shaped by an eternal lens? Do you view every person, place, and thing in your life through the lens of giving God glory and enjoying Him? So, for example, when you eat good food or you get a new toy or you see something beautiful or you enjoy time with a special person that's dear to you, how quickly do your thoughts turn to God? You see, this is what it looks like to practically be in the world but not of the world. Everything connects to our love and affection for God.

When you take a bite of food that's truly delicious and your heart bursts with gratitude to God because you realize He's the one who gave me the ability to eat this, He's even the one that chose for food to be enjoyable. He didn't have to do that. Food could have just been a physical process that we have to go through like getting an IV or something that had no enjoyment whatsoever and yet God made it wonderful. He made it to be enjoyed.

So when you realize that the reason that food is so good is because a good God made it and gave it to you, it changes everything. You eat the food but your heart is bursting with gratitude towards the Holy God who kindly gave it to you.

When you give a gift to another person or to the church but it's truly out of a heart of gratitude because you're so overwhelmed with how generous God has been to you, then you give glory to God and enjoy Him forever. When you laugh with your spouse or with your children or with your grandchildren and in your heart you say, oh God, thank you for giving me my family. You're enjoying God and bringing glory to Him.

You see, this is what godliness looks like but the world doesn't do these things. Godliness is not accomplished by shunning all temporal things. It's accomplished by a commitment to pursue, attain, enjoy, and give away temporal things for the transcendent purpose of glorifying God and enjoying Him forever.

Now this point in our passage, the author wants us to understand why we need to be so on guard against these two dangers of immorality and godliness. And to accomplish that, this is where the illustration comes in. It's going to give us the illustration of a man who was defined by immorality and godlessness. The man Esau, seeing to it that there be no immoral or godless person like Esau.

Now the story of Esau is contained in the book of Genesis. It begins in 25, chapter 25, and he is mentioned periodically on again and off again through chapter 36. But in case your Old Testament genealogies are a little rusty, let me remind you, Abraham and Sarah in their old age are given the gift of a baby boy, Isaac.

Isaac goes on to marry Rebekah, and God gives them the gift of twin baby boys, Esau and Jacob. Esau being the eldest, Jacob being the youngest. So in what way was Esau an immoral and godless man? Well, the text focuses with the illustration on the fact that he was godless, and so we don't have as much information on the fact that he was immoral, although Jewish tradition, there's a lot of Jewish ancient tradition that speaks of other escapades in his life that certainly fall under the umbrella of sexual morality, but they're outside the canon of Scripture.

The only thing we have in Scripture that really fits the bill when it comes to some kind of immorality would be his choice to marry foreign wives, as it's described in Genesis 26, as well as polygamy, because he marries two of them. Genesis 26:34-35:

"³⁴ When Esau was forty years old he married Judith the daughter of Beeri the Hittite, and Basemath the daughter of Elon the Hittite; ³⁵ and they brought grief to Isaac and Rebekah."

Now why did these women bring grief to Isaac and Rebekah? It was because, you remember, when God sent Abraham into that land, it was not to assimilate his family line into the lines of the families of that area. It was to say, I'm going to give you this land, and I'm going to take it from these people. And so that's one of the reasons it was so important for Abraham to send his servant, you remember, back to get a wife for Isaac. You remember that story? And to bring her back from their homeland.

Esau would have known that story. He had to have known that story of how his parents came together, and yet he ignored the spiritual significance of that story, and just chose to take wives from the land, and it brought grief to the heart of his parents.

But the bigger issue in his life seems to be the fact that Esau was godless. He was a worldly man. And that's the specific instance that's given to us here in Hebrews. A great moment of illustration of what it looks like to be godless.

Because it says here in verse 16, not to be like Esau *who sold his own birthright for a single meal*. Now this is a crucial moment in the life of both Jacob and Esau, but in Esau's case, it reveals just how worldly he really was. Remember, that term godless, to make sure we're keeping it straight in our mind, or totally worldly, means that a person really has no appetite for transcendent things. They live their life on a temporal scale, and temporal things dominate their perspective. That's exactly what we see here in Esau as he chooses unthinkably to sell his birthright for one lunch. That's about as short-sighted as you can be. That's the idea.

Genesis 25:27-34: ²⁷ *When the boys grew up, Esau became a skillful hunter, a man of the field, but Jacob was a peaceful man, living in tents. ²⁸ Now Isaac loved Esau, because he had a taste for game, but Rebekah loved Jacob. ²⁹ When Jacob had cooked stew, Esau came*

in from the field and he was famished; ³⁰ and Esau said to Jacob, "Please let me have a swallow of that red stuff there, for I am famished." Therefore his name was called Edom. (Edom means red) ³¹ But Jacob said, "First sell me your birthright."³² Esau said, "Behold, I am about to die; so of what use then is the birthright to me?" ³³ And Jacob said, "First swear to me"; so he swore to him, and sold his birthright to Jacob. ³⁴ Then Jacob gave Esau bread and lentil stew; and he ate and drank, and rose and went on his way. Thus Esau despised his birthright.

Now to understand the true significance of that story, we have to talk about the birthright. What is the birthright? Well, if you like old English movies, then you know about birthrights. This is something that happened not only in this context, it continued on for many generations. It was the common practice that the eldest son would inherit the family estate and carry on the family name.

So certainly that is included in the birthright that he just sold. He sold his right to all of his inheritance of his father's possessions. But in the case of this family, the birthright has even greater significance. Because remember, part of the birthright is the promise that God had given to this family beginning with Abraham, passed on to Isaac, which would then pass on to his heir. This is the Abrahamic covenant as it's outlined in Genesis 12. You remember:

"Now the Lord said to Abram, "Go forth from your country, And from your relatives And from your father's house, To the land which I will show you; ² And I will make you a great nation, And I will bless you, And make your name great; And so you shall be a blessing; ³ And I will bless those who bless you, And the one who curses you I will curse. And in you all the families of the earth will be blessed."

You remember, that last line is really a prophecy of Messiah that through their bloodline would come this One who would bless the whole world, the Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ. So this is why this is such a big deal. Obviously, it would be a short-sighted decision to trade a true earthly inheritance even for a single lunch. But to trade this birthright for a lunch is unthinkable.

To give up, to have no spiritual awareness to the point to be so spiritually unaffected by God and His words that you can give away the promise given to Abraham for a lunch is unthinkably short-sighted.

So why in the world did he do that? Because he was a godless man. That's the idea. That's the illustration. He was a worldly man. This is the pinnacle of godlessness, of worldliness, of short-sightedness.

And the author is inspired to tell us here, church, don't be like Esau. Don't go the way of Esau. Don't be short-sighted in godlessness. But be godly. Take God and His words seriously. Take Him into account into everything that you do. Flee from such godlessness.

And the thing is, Esau's refusal to think about that decision deeply and how it related to Yahweh was something that brought great and terrible consequences. But in the moment, he didn't realize that. He wouldn't know those consequences until much later.

By the way, this is one of the reasons that godlessness is so destructive. In the moment, a temporary godless decision can seem like a pretty good idea. The truth is, that stew sounds pretty delicious when you read the description. It probably tasted great. I imagine Esau left his brother's tent and thought, man, I'm fat and happy. That was a good trade. I got what I wanted. And he went on with his business. It seemed like the best decision in the world. Until. Until the true consequences of that decision were reaped.

And the true consequences of that decision are what is contained in verse 17. Verse 17 says:

"¹⁷ For you know that even afterwards, when he desired to inherit the blessing, he was rejected, for he found no place for repentance, though he sought for it with tears."

When he desired to inherit the blessing, he was rejected. Now, this is a reference to another sad episode in Esau's life much further into the future. Now his father Isaac has reached old age. And he has called in his son, his eldest son, to give him his fatherly blessing that he will bestow on him before his death. This is a tradition that would carry on with his son Jacob. He would do this later in Genesis as well.

And it was not until this instance of the fatherly blessing that Esau began to realize how drastic of a sinful decision he had made. And the consequences that it would have for his life. For so flippantly despising his birthright.

We don't have time to read the entire account. Let me just remind you quickly in summary fashion. You remember, Isaac tells Esau, go and hunt, come back, make a meal, come in that I may bless you. Rebecca, his wife, hears this and goes behind the scenes with Jacob and they make a plot for Jacob to steal this blessing. So Jacob dresses up like his brother and he brings a meal to his father. His father is duped. He gives the blessing to Jacob that he thought he was giving to Esau. And then Esau finally comes in after having successfully hunted and cooks the meal and now he brings it into his father, Isaac. Only Isaac realizes, wait a minute, something's off.

Genesis 27:33:³³ *Then Isaac trembled violently, and said, "Who was he then that hunted game and brought it to me, so that I ate of all of it before you came, and blessed him? Yes, and he shall be blessed."*

Now pause there for a moment. Isaac is obviously, rightly, upset that he's been tricked. But what he doesn't do is somehow try to retract the blessing that he gave to give it to Esau. He realizes, even in this moment of distress, that this must be the providential plan of God. The one that I blessed is going to be the one who is blessed. And so, he doesn't take back the blessing. He continues to go on in verse 34.

"³⁴ When Esau heard the words of his father, he cried out with an exceedingly great and bitter cry, and said to his father, "Bless me, even me also, O my father!" ³⁵ And he said, "Your brother came deceitfully and has taken away your blessing." ³⁶ Then he said, "Is he not rightly named Jacob, for he has supplanted me these two times? He took away my birthright, and behold, now he has taken away my blessing." And he said, "Have you not reserved a blessing for me?" ³⁷ But Isaac replied to Esau, "Behold, I have made him your master, and all

his relatives I have given to him as servants; and with grain and new wine I have sustained him. Now as for you then, what can I do, my son?" ³⁸ Esau said to his father, "Do you have only one blessing, my father? Bless me, even me also, O my father." So Esau lifted his voice and wept. ³⁹ Then Isaac his father answered and said to him, "Behold, away from the fertility of the earth shall be your dwelling, And away from the dew of heaven from above."⁴⁰ "By your sword you shall live, And your brother you shall serve; But it shall come about when you become restless, That you will break his yoke from your neck."

Now let me be clear, I'm not seeking to absolve Jacob and Rebecca from wrongdoing and how these things came to pass, but they're not the focus of the passage. The focus of the passage is on Esau and his choices and what this meant. And ultimately, what this meant is God providentially arranged these circumstances in such a way to make it clear that Esau had been rejected. That God had rejected Esau. This is the point.

Esau's consequences for his godlessness now come into play. He flippantly treated his birthright as worthless, and in so doing found himself rejected by a holy God. And astonishingly, Esau's worldliness is made even clearer to see because of the response that he has once he realized he's been rejected. And this is what's outlined here in the rest of verse 17. It says: "*For he found no place for repentance, though he sought for it with tears.*"

Now, you may be aware of this. This is one of those passages in which commentators have spilled much ink. There's a lot of wrangling about what does this exactly mean. And the key to understanding this verse comes down to two questions. One, what is meant by the phrase "he found no place for repentance"? And two, what does the pronoun "it" refer to? What word does it refer to? And I think it's actually most helpful to answer those questions in reverse.

Let's first consider what does the pronoun "it" refer to in this passage? Because in English it reads as if it could either refer to repentance or the word blessing. So what did he seek with tears? Did Esau seek repentance with tears? Or did he seek the blessing with tears? Well, the answer to that is actually more simple than it may appear, particularly when you look at the Greek text. The Greek grammar in this verse helps us a ton, as well as the details of the account in Genesis. When we put those two together, we come away with a pretty clear answer.

The reason for that is in English the word "it" seems as if it can apply to either word. But thankfully, by God's grace, in the Greek language, pronouns are required grammatically to match the form of what they modify. If you've studied Spanish or other inflective languages where things change, it's the same way where the pronoun must match the gender or the case of that particular word. In this case, the word "it" in Greek matches the word "blessing". It does not match the word repentance. If you're a Greek student, both blessing and the pronoun "it" are in the accusative case. Repentance is in the genitive case.

And so, grammatically, it cannot refer to repentance. It must refer to blessing. But even beyond that, we just read the account. Esau wept. He wept greatly. But what was he weeping for? The blessing. Over and over again. Father, do you not have a blessing for me? Do you not have, do you only have one blessing? I want the blessing. And when he realizes he doesn't get the blessing, it's then that he begins to cry out and weep in anguish.

So, in this passage, the author of Hebrews is referring to that he sought the blessing with tears. The reason that's important is because some have taken this strangely to mean something like this, that Esau was genuinely repentant. He was crying out for God to forgive him, but God said no. That's not what the text means. What it means is, this is an illustration of his godlessness. In the moment, he didn't even consider the fact that he had sinned against a holy God. What was he upset about? I lost the blessing. I want the blessing. He wanted the blessing.

He didn't want restoration with God. He didn't even seem to seek that or understand that that was the issue. So when, then, we consider the phrase he found no place for repentance, this is instructive for us. What happened here is because Esau was such a godless man, he did not seek biblical repentance. That's what it means. Instead, he sought the worldly blessing.

This is an example of what Paul refers to as worldly sorrow. The Bible is clear that there is a great difference between biblical repentance and worldly sorrow. This is how Paul explains it in 2 Corinthians 7. He says:

"⁸ For though I caused you sorrow by my letter, I do not regret it; though I did regret it—for I see that that letter caused you sorrow, though only for a while—⁹ I now rejoice, not that you were made sorrowful, but that you were made sorrowful to the point of repentance; for you were made sorrowful according to the will of God, so that you might not suffer loss in anything through us. (Listen to this.) ¹⁰ For the sorrow that is according to the will of God produces a repentance without regret, leading to salvation, but the sorrow of the world produces death."

This is the difference between biblical repentance and worldly sorrow. Esau is an historical example of exactly what Paul's describing here in verse 10. There is massive amounts of difference between true repentance and worldly sorrow.

And here's the tricky part. Both true repentance and worldly sorrow come with outward manifestations of grief. In fact, both of them can be said to be genuinely sorrowful. Both cases are truly grieving. The difference is what are they grieving over? Worldly sorrow grieves over personal consequences because of sin and the loss of whatever temporal thing that's been taken from them.

This was what Esau was grieving over. The consequences were weighing down on him. He had met the teeth behind that light bulb, and now he was paying for it, and it meant he didn't get the temporal blessing he so longed to have.

But true repentance is different. Biblically, repentance is defined as a turning away from sin. It begins in the mind. It is a decision made in the heart of a person, but it's a decision that will go on to bear outward fruit. This is why John the Baptist famously said to the Pharisees, bear fruit in keeping with repentance.

What he's saying is true repentance, yes, it begins as a matter of the heart, but it will demonstrate itself in outward fruit. But Paul says worldly sorrow doesn't lead to

repentance. It doesn't lead to a forsaking of sin. It leads to death, leads to further sin which results in death.

So here's the key difference in summary. Godly sorrow leads to repentance because the sorrow is focused on how the person has sinned against God and others.

You talk to a truly repentant person, and they actually are okay with whatever consequences are given to them because they see it as just. What they are concerned with is being right with God and making it right with any people that were affected by their sin. This is what biblical repentance produces.

This is what we see in David in Psalm 51, his repentant psalm:

*"Be gracious to me, O God, according to Your lovingkindness;
According to the greatness of Your compassion blot out my transgressions.*

*² Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity
And cleanse me from my sin.*

*³ For I know my transgressions,
And my sin is ever before me.*

*⁴ Against You, You only, I have sinned
And done what is evil in Your sight,
So that You are justified when You speak
And blameless when You judge."*

You see how he humbly submits himself to the just judgment of God for his sin. He says, I'm guilty. I'm calling out to you for forgiveness.

On the other hand, worldly sorrow is grieved over the temporal loss and personal consequences that come their way. So Esau cried out, not because his eyes were open to the gravity of his sin and he was asking for God to forgive him. No, he cried out because he suddenly realized the consequences he was suffering for his sinful choices.

To a worldly person, the greatest grief in the world is the loss of temporal good and the experiencing of negative consequences. And here's another sign. To a worldly person who is exhibiting worldly sorrow, what happens is they don't seek restoration with God or others.

Instead, their relationship becomes more and more bitter towards God and others. We see this first of all in Proverbs 19:3:

"³ The foolishness of man ruins his way, And his heart rages against the Lord"

You see that? It's his own foolishness that brought him to this place but instead, does he seek peace with God? No, he gets angry with God over the consequences that God brings into his life.

The same thing happens in human relationships when there's worldly sorrow. It creates more and more bitterness and envy and jealousy, even murder in these cases. We see this even in Esau.

Esau, it says this about him in verse 41 of Genesis 27:

⁴¹ So Esau bore a grudge against Jacob because of the blessing with which his father had blessed him; and Esau said to himself, "The days of mourning for my father are near; then I will kill my brother Jacob."

This is worldly sorrow. It produces a bitterness, a hatred towards God and man but godly repentance brings peace with God and a love and a desire for restoration with men.

So now you see the difference. This is why we must, by God's grace, fight against these two vices of immorality, of godlessness. We must fight against it individually. We must fight against it as a church body. And that really is the application of the passage.

Number one, **Put Immorality to Death**. Put immorality to death. I need to ask you some serious questions this morning. Honestly, how seriously are you guarding your thoughts, words, and actions when it comes to sexual sin?

Let me ask you, how do you pursue purity as you consider your use of things like social media, television, YouTube, books, magazines? How do you pursue purity when it comes to your speech? Is your speech filled with sexual jokes and innuendo and vulgarity?

How do you pursue purity in your actions when it comes to the way that you look at other people, think about other people, talk to and about other people, and physically interact with other people?

Listen, we can't take this sin too seriously. The Bible is abundantly clear that sex is a good gift that God created for the benefit of marriage. But outside of that good context, it is like poison to your soul. And consider this, we shake our heads at how foolish Esau was to so flippantly cast aside his inheritance for something so fleeting as a bowl of soup. But it is no less foolish to cast aside a close relationship with God, a healthy marriage, a pure heart, and a pure mind for 30 seconds of looking at a Photoshopped image of a naked stranger on a six-inch iPhone. It is foolishness! And it will destroy you. And it'll destroy your family. It'll hurt the church of Christ.

Church, we've got to see this for what it is. The king has no clothes, as the story goes. It is a ruse. It is not true. It will not bring you the satisfaction that it promises. It is the little light in the darkness, and there are teeth behind it to hurt you. See it for what it is. It will not bring the satisfaction that can only be brought through glorifying God and enjoying Him forever. Don't fall into it. Don't believe it for a moment.

Oh, God, help us in these things. Help us to see the deception of sin. God, help us to forsake it, to love You and enjoy You above all else. Oh, may You help us.

So what do you do this morning if you would honestly say, you know what, I'm trapped in sexual sin? The answer is, whatever it takes. Confess, cut off every access point, get help from a mature believer who can help you understand how the gospel applies to this sin, how to put off and renew your mind and put on and to walk in righteousness.

But let me encourage you, don't leave this place today. Don't leave here still in bondage to sin. Come and talk to somebody. Come and talk to me. Come and talk to a mature believer you know in the church. We will help you. We will not cast you away. But don't live in sexual sin.

Secondly, **Put Godlessness to Death.** Put godlessness to death. As we think about this, honestly, do you see all of life through the lens of glorifying God and enjoying Him forever? I don't mean can you answer the catechism question. We know the answer to the question.

I mean literally, do you see your life through the lens of how can I glorify God and enjoy Him forever? How do you know if that's true of your life? Well, is the joy you feel over things that you own rooted only in the object itself or in gratitude towards a holy and good God who gave that thing to you? Do you consider all your resources in light of God's word an eternity? Is God's word the guide for what you will and will not do and how you will use things once you obtain them? Do you view the people in your life through the lens of God and eternity in your relationships? Are you honestly content with what God has given you? Are you able to walk the line between pursuing things by working hard and earning money while also being very content with what God has given you in your life? Are you able to do that? How do you do that?

You do that with an eternal perspective, understanding temporal things in light of transcendent things and that God is the good God who gives us whatever He chooses to give us both to use for His kingdom, to enjoy, but it's all for His glory. Does the glory of God and the enjoyment of God shape the way that you pursue earning money, saving money, spending money? After all, what is a godly person anyway? You know, we say that, that's a godly man. What does that mean? Usually, we mean that there's some aspect of that person's character that demonstrates godliness and that's true, but where does that even come from? How do you become a godly person?

Well, obviously, you must be in Christ. It's something Christ does in us, but when we talk about a godly person, really it is to have a God-centered perspective about all things. That is what produces godliness. We see the whole world and everything in it as it relates to God and eternity, transcendent things.

So let me ask you, what temporal things most easily steal your affections in this world? What temporal things are you most tempted to pursue in a sinful way? What temporal things have you failed to connect to God and eternity in your thinking about them?

You see, we must be a people who are in the world, but not worldly. A people whose joy in temporal things is rooted always in eternal things. May we be a people whose true ambition and joy in life is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever.

And let me say to you this morning, if after going through this passage, you look at your life and you say, you know what, I'm Esau, immoral, godless, that's me. What hope is there for me this morning? There's great hope for you in Christ. The truth is, every person in this room would be Esau if it had not been for the grace of a holy God in Christ.

The good news of the gospel is the answer to that question. Not a worldly sorrow, don't leave this place with self-pity, woe is me, my life is so hard, only to go back and do the same things you've always done before.

No, what is required is biblical repentance. If you will turn in your heart to the Lord Jesus Christ and confess your sin, and not only that you are a sinner, but your desire to turn from that sin and forsake that sin for the love of Christ, because your faith is in Him and what He has done for you on the cross, you will be saved from your sin, both in the sense of forgiveness and in the ability to walk away from that sin by God's grace, no longer to live a life trapped in that sin.

You don't have to be Esau anymore, but you must humble yourself in repentance and faith, and you will find God eager and ready to forgive you and wash you white as snow. But may we be a church who is committed individually and corporately to putting to death immorality and godlessness for His glory. Amen. Let's pray.

God, this is our prayer. We thank You that as we pray it, we do so in hope because we serve a God who is powerful, transforms every corner of our lives. Everything we interact with now has the aroma of eternity. It's meaningful in a new way because it connects in some way to our ability to glorify You and enjoy You forever.

God, help this to be our perspective. And God, I pray for our people. I pray for my own heart. God, I pray that we would be a pure people, that we would be a people who are godly. And if there be anyone here trapped in not only sexual sin, but any kind of sin, that today would be the day by Your grace, that they recognize that they no longer need to live under the lie that they will always be bound to that sin by Your grace. You give forgiveness and freedom, power to walk in newness of life.

God, help us to believe these things and act on them by Your grace. May You be glorified through it. In Christ's name, Amen.