
Words of Truth

Hebrews 12:15-17

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After the instruction to follow peace with all (Hebrews 12:14), we have the instructions we are going to examine in this article. Consider the following: *“Looking diligently lest any man fail of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up trouble you, and thereby many be defiled; Lest there be any fornicator, or profane person, as Esau, who for one morsel of meat sold his birthright. For ye know how that afterward, when he would have inherited the blessing, he was rejected: for he found no place of repentance, though he sought it carefully with tears”* (Hebrews 12:15-17).

The phrase translated “looking diligently” [ἐπισκοπέω] means: “To beware: — look diligently, take the oversight. To look upon, inspect, oversee, look after, care for; of the care of the church which rested upon the elders. To look carefully, beware” (Strong’s # 1983). The only other time you see that Greek term is in I Peter 5:2. In that passage the term is translated “oversight” and is talking about elders. So, take some time to process that. The Lord’s instruction here is to take oversight of your faithfulness to Him. To inspect yourself as a shepherd would his flock. This is a consistent truth throughout the Scriptures (Psalms 119:59, Lamentations 3:40, Haggai 1:5, Haggai 1:7, I Corinthians 11:28-31, II Corinthians 13:5, and Galatians 6:4).

If in that examination of one’s self that person were to find his or herself bitter, changes need to be made. Paul wrote: *“Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice”* (Ephesians 4:31). To bring about the point, the Holy Spirit had the writers of this letter bring Esau forth as an example. If you will recall, Jacob and Esau were brothers. Their father was Isaac. When it came time for Isaac to give the birthright to the eldest there was certainly some problems. For one, Jacob and their mother Rebekah tricked Isaac into giving the blessing to Jacob (Genesis 27:1-33). As a result, there was bitterness on Esau’s part. Notice: *“And when Esau heard the words of his father, he cried with a great and exceeding bitter cry, and said unto his father, Bless me, even me also, O my father”* (Genesis 27:34).

The problem behind Esau’s bitterness didn’t start with Jacob’s deception. The text we are studying draws us back to an earlier account that ties the two situations together as one. For a greater understanding of the whole situation, I am going to give the record going back a little further than what is referenced. Notice: *“And Isaac intreated the LORD for his wife,*

because she was barren: and the LORD was intreated of him, and Rebekah his wife conceived. And the children struggled together within her; and she said, If it be so, why am I thus? And she went to enquire of the LORD. And the LORD said unto her, Two nations are in thy womb, and two manner of people shall be separated from thy bowels; and the one people shall be stronger than the other people; and the elder shall serve the younger. And when her days to be delivered were fulfilled, behold, there were twins in her womb. And the first came out red, all over like an hairy garment; and they called his name Esau. And after that came his brother out, and his hand took hold on Esau's heel; and his name was called Jacob: and Isaac was threescore years old when she bare them. And the boys grew: and Esau was a cunning hunter, a man of the field; and Jacob was a plain man, dwelling in tents. And Isaac loved Esau, because he did eat of his venison: but Rebekah loved Jacob. And Jacob sod pottage: and Esau came from the field, and he was faint: And Esau said to Jacob, Feed me, I pray thee, with that same red pottage; for I am faint: therefore was his name called Edom. And Jacob said, Sell me this day thy birthright. And Esau said, Behold, I am at the point to die: and what profit shall this birthright do to me? And Jacob said, Swear to me this day; and he sware unto him: and he sold his birthright unto Jacob. Then Jacob gave Esau bread and pottage of lentiles; and he did eat and drink, and rose up, and went his way: thus Esau despised his birthright” (Genesis 25:21-34).

Esau gave up his birthright. Our (those whom have obeyed the will of the Lord) birthright is the kingdom of Heaven (John 3:1-5). By using self-examination, we need to weigh our spiritual condition. We have to consider whether or not we have failed when it comes to the grace of God. The warning is that a person can fall from grace (Galatians 5:4). It would do us all well if we never lose sight of the fact that we could fall away and lose our inheritance (Luke 8:13, I Corinthians 9:24-27, I Corinthians 10:1-12, Galatians 1:6-9, Galatians 3:1-3, Galatians 5:7-9, I Timothy 4:1, Hebrews 3:12-13, II Peter 2:20-22, Revelation 2:1-7, and Revelation 22:18-19).

There are some other words we ought to pay attention to in Hebrews 12:15-17. Such as something “springing up” that troubles a person. Like we read earlier in this chapter, anything in our way needs to be set aside (Hebrews 12:1-3). Consider also the word “defiled” in the text. Even the most corrupt Jews, such as those who delivered Jesus to be put to death, understood what it meant to be defiled (John 18:28). Bitterness defiles a person. The text also talks about fornicators. We know fornicators will not be saved (Ephesians 5:5).

Finally, consider why the Lord brought up that Esau sought a place for repentance, but there was no place found. Twice in this letter it was established that someone can walk too far away from God (Hebrews 5:12-6:6 and Hebrews 10:26-31). Sure, confession and repentance from sin can save an erring Christian (II Timothy 2:24-26 and I John 1:9). However, we should not take that as a given (Acts 8:13-24). So, we should take that message and be sure we are always ready to be judged by the Lord (Matthew 24:35-25:46).