

Text: Hebrews 12:12-13

Title: Spiritual Strength for the Weak

Truth:

Date/Location: Sunday November 20, 2011 at FBC

Introduction

This is not an easy pair of verses to understand. Let us carefully dig into their meaning and see if we can grow in the Lord thereby.

I. Difficult Situation

A. Hands that are weak. The hands could be described as slackened or fallen at one's side.

B. Knees that are feeble. These knees are disabled.

In both cases, the disability is described by a perfect passive participle.

The significance of this is simply that some outside forces worked on the hands and knees to make them weak, and this has had a continuing effect on them.

There is not much more difficult than hands that do not function properly, or knees that are painful or wobbly because of fear.

The Bible here is using the language of the physical body to express what is going on inside of the person's spirit. The knees and hands are being used as metonyms—parts standing in place of the whole. Furthermore, the particular physical condition of these body parts refers to well-known emotional or spiritual issues.

The condition of the hands refers to discouragement and weariness of one's whole being. You can imagine it being associated with the hanging head and bowed back of someone who is exhausted and defeated.

The weakness of the knees refers to fearfulness in one's whole being. There is fear and trepidation at what has happened or what is coming.

These conditions are the results of running in the race of life itself.

Remember, we are told to run with endurance. But endurance requires us to resist sin and to deal with the persecution of sinners. Endurance requires us to handle the chastening hand of God and the pain of His correction. This is precisely why the verse starts with the word "therefore." In keeping with the previous context, which

mentions things that can be discouraging, the Bible now gives encouragement to keep on going in the strength of the Lord.

- C. *Lame*. This is another description of the kind of weakness that above is in the hands and knees. This word refers to someone who cannot walk. Perhaps they are missing a foot or have some other disability.

Lame does not refer to something that is “uncool” or “unsophisticated” or “out of touch.”

Biblical examples of literal lameness: Acts 3:2, 14:8, Matthew 11:5, 18:8 (Mark 9:45), 15:30-31, 21:14; Luke 7:22, 14:13, 14:21; John 5:3; Acts 8:7.

The idea of lameness is used to refer to someone who is not able to run the race well.

The overall picture is one of a runner who is out of steam and about to fall by the wayside in the race of the Christian life. Their endurance is about to evaporate.

- D. This situation of weakness and fear and handicap at running is one that affects not just individuals in the church, but rather the whole church. So we must not think about the problem, nor the solution, in a strictly individualistic sense. We are watching out not only for ourselves, but for our brothers and sisters as well.

II. Corrective Action

Some runners are in dire straits. What to do? There is no internal strength left to call upon, or strength that can be manufactured internally by simple mental resolve. But there is something that the assembly and individuals can do to help. In fact, we must help. There are two commands:

A. Strengthen.

This is the first command. It is plural, indicating that the whole church is involved together.

Acts 15:16 uses the same word to refer to building something again after it has fallen down. It is also used in Luke 13:13 to describe the bent-over woman whose posture was straightened by the Lord Jesus. She had been stuck like that for 18 years and could not straighten up.

So we are talking about fortifying, building, lifting up the hands. Picture the bent over, head-hanging runner getting a fresh burst of energy to run to the end of his course with renewed vigor and vitality.

B. Make straight paths.

This is a command. Again, it is plural. Individuals and the church participate by helping each other along the way.

A straight path can be “run” more quickly and efficiently than a winding, curvy, hilly, rocky path. We must eliminate obstacles to our running and the running of others. Certainly do not add any obstacles!

C. How precisely do we do this?

This is probably the hardest aspect of these two verses to understand. We look to the immediate context first, and then the wider Biblical context, to help us.

1. Immediate context. The strength that we are finding is not in ourselves. Rather, we are **looking to the Lord and relying on Him**. When we remember the major themes of Hebrews, we can see how looking to the Lord helps us:

- a. He is the great and righteous King who is better than the angels, Moses, the old priesthood and sacrificial system.
- b. He made the once-for-all sacrifice for our sins that cannot be repeated.
- c. He is the Mediator of the new covenant which brings us into a unique relationship with God not previously enjoyed by humans.
- d. We are “looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith” in 12:2.
- e. We are considering Him who endured such hostility from sinners against Himself (Heb. 12:3).
- f. We are remembering that God loves His children and thus disciplines them for their eternal profit and present fruit of righteousness (Heb. 12:5-11).
- g. We also note that 12:14-15 emphasize relationships with one another (pursuing of peace, eschewing of bitterness). These can have the effect of straightening the path for our feet.

2. Biblical context. These verses are basically quotes of two Old Testament passages.

- a. The first passage is Isaiah 35:3-4. Read the entire chapter to get the proper sense of it. Despite present judgment, God says to Israel, Zion will be restored to everlasting glory. Do you have fear? Are you weak? Look to the salvation of God. See how He will heal the lame and bring joy and rejoicing to Israel? So it is with us. He will return and bring judgment on all that is evil and

will bring final salvation to us. Remember Hebrews 10:36-39.

Jesus is coming to bring salvation to completion.

- b. The second passage is Proverbs 4:26. It is quoted from the Septuagint so it doesn't match exactly the Hebrew. The reason is that the verb that starts the verse in Hebrew can be translated "to weigh" (thus, to ponder or give careful thought). Or, it can be translated "to make level, clear a way." The surrounding verses help us understand the point. Verses 1-9 talk about receiving wisdom. The remainder of the passage deals a lot with the "right path" to live on (v. 11, 12, 14, 18, 19, 27). This path includes paying attention to the words of God, keeping our hearts with diligence, putting away lying or perverse speech, and —the key— removing our feet from evil. **Straight paths are righteous paths.**

III. Healthy Goal

- A. That lame things may not be dislocated.

The goal of the action is that what is weak not get worse and be dislocated. The idea is that something not be wrenched or twisted out of place. In spiritual matters, the word is used of those who turn aside away from sound teaching and follow false teaching (1 Tim. 1:6, 5:15, 2 Tim. 4:4).

This implies something going from bad (lame, weak) to worse (dislocated, broken). It seems that continuing in the weakened position can cause things to degrade even more. Thus action is needed to turn the situation around and improve things. Continuing in sin is the main way things go from bad to worse.

- B. That lame things may rather be healed.

If we get our feet away from evil, then healing can take place. Sin of whatever sort—lack of trust in God, bad speech, wicked steps, etc.—is like a disease.

Healing is a metaphor for how God solves the sin problem. Examples: Matthew 13:15 (John 12:40, Acts 28:27), James 5:16, 1 Peter 2:24, Isaiah 53:5.

Conclusion

The resources for being strengthened are found in God. Eph. 3:16 is an example: strengthened with power through God's Spirit in our inner man. So it is not our own inner resolve, but resources that God has provided in the Word and, yes, inside by His indwelling Spirit. MAP