

## CHAPTER 83

### THE DEMANDS OF FAITH

#### (~~8201~~ HEBREWS 12:1)

Our present verse is a call to constancy in the Christian profession; it is an exhortation unto steadfastness in the Christian life; it is a pressing appeal for making personal holiness our supreme business and quest. In substance our text is parallel with such verses as ~~4063~~ Matthew 16:24, ~~8163~~ Romans 6:13, ~~4700~~ 2 Corinthians 7:1, ~~5182~~ Philippians 3:12-14, ~~8182~~ Titus 2:12, ~~8182~~ 1 Peter 2:9-12. This summarization of the Christian's twofold duty is given again and again in the Scriptures: the duty of mortification and of vivification, the putting off of the "old man" and the putting on of the "new man" (~~4042~~ Ephesians 4:22-24). Analyzing the particular terms of our text, we find there is, first, the duty enjoined: to "run the race that is set before us." Second, the obstacles to be overcome: "lay aside every weight" etc. Third, the essential grace which is requisite thereto: "patience." Fourth, the encouragement given: the "great cloud of witnesses."

The opening "Wherefore" in our text looks back to ~~8105~~ Hebrews 10:35, 36, where the apostle had urged,

*"Cast not away therefore your confidence, which hath great recompense of reward. For ye have need of patience, that, after ye have done the will of God, ye might receive the promise."*

That exhortation had been followed by a lengthy proof of the efficacy of persevering faith to enable its possessors to do whatever God commands, however difficult; to endure whatever God appoints, however severe; to obtain what He promises, however seemingly unattainable. All of this had been copiously illustrated in chapter 11, by a review of the history of God's people in the past, who had exemplified so strikingly and so blessedly the nature, the trails, and the triumphs of a spiritual faith. Having affirmed the *unity* of the family of God, the oneness of the O.T. and N.T. saints, assuring the latter that God has provided some better thing for us, the

apostle now repeats the exhortation unto steadfast perseverance in the path of faith and obedience.

“*Wherefore* seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, *let us.*” Here the apostle applies the various illustrations given in the preceding chapter, making use of them as a grand motive to perseverance in the Christian faith and state.

“If all the saints of God lived, suffered, endured, and conquered by faith, shall not we also? If the saints who lived before the Incarnation, before the redemption was accomplished, before the High Priest entered the heavenly sanctuary, trusted in the midst of discouragements and trials, how much more ought we who know the name of Jesus, who have received the beginning, the installment of the great Messianic promise?” (Adolph Saphir).

Herein we are shown that only then do we read the O.T. narratives unto profit when we draw from them incentives to practical godliness.

In Hebrews 11 we have had described at length many aspects and characteristics of *the life of faith*. There we saw that a life of faith is an intensely practical thing, consisting of very much more than day-dreaming, or being regaled with joyous emotions, or even resting in orthodox views of the truth. By faith Noah built an ark, Abraham separated from his idolatrous neighbors and gained a rich inheritance, Moses forsook Egypt and became leader of Israel’s hosts. By faith the Red Sea was crossed, Jericho captured, Goliath slain, the mouths of lions were closed, the violence of fire was quenched. A spiritual faith, then, is not a passive thing, but an active, energetic, vigorous, and fruitful one. The *same* line of thought is continued in the passage which is now before us, the *same* branch of truth is there in view again, only under a figure — a figure very emphatic and graphic.

“Let us *run* with patience the race that is set before us.” Here the Christian is likened unto an athlete, and his life unto the running of a race. This is one of a number of figures used in the N.T. to describe the Christian life. Believers are likened to shining lights, branches of the vine, soldiers, strangers and pilgrims: the last-mentioned more closely resembling the figure employed in our text, but with this difference: travelers may rest for awhile, and refresh themselves, but the racer must *continue* running or he ceases to be a “racer.” The figure of the race occurs frequently, both in the

O.T. and N.T.: ~~1932~~ Psalm 119:32, ~~2004~~ Song of Solomon 1:4, ~~4024~~ 1 Corinthians 9:24, ~~3084~~ Philippians 3:14, ~~5347~~ 2 Timothy 4:7. Very solemn is that word in ~~867~~ Galatians 5:7, “ye *did* run well”: the Lord, in His mercy, grant that *that* may never be said of writer or reader.

The principal thoughts suggested by the figure of the “race” are rigorous self-denial and discipline, vigorous exertion, persevering endurance. The Christian life is not a thing of passive luxuriation, but of active “*fighting* the good fight of faith!” The Christian is not called to lie down on flowery beds of ease, but to run a race, and athletics are strenuous, demanding self-sacrifice, hard training, the putting forth of every ounce of energy possessed. I am afraid that in this work-hating and pleasure-loving age, we do not keep this aspect of the truth sufficiently before us: we take things too placidly and lazily. The charge which God brought against Israel of old applies very largely to Christendom today: “Woe to them that are *at ease* in Zion” (~~3069~~ Amos 6:1): to be “at ease” is the very opposite of “running the race.”

The “race” is that life of faith and obedience, that pursuit of personal holiness, to which the Christian is called by God. Turning from sin and the world in penitence and trust to Christ is not the finishing-post, but only the starting-point. The Christian race begins at the new birth, and ends not till we are summoned to leave this world. The prize to be run for is heavenly glory. The ground to be covered is our journey through this life. The track itself is “set before us”: marked out in the Word. The rules to be observed, the path which is to be traversed, the difficulties to be overcome, the dangers to be avoided, the source and secret of the needed strength, are all plainly revealed in the holy Scriptures. If we lose, the blame is entirely ours; if we succeed, the glory belongs to God alone.

The prime thought suggested in the figure of running the race set before us is not that of speed, but of self-discipline, whole-hearted endeavor, the calling into action of every spiritual faculty possessed by the new man. In his helpful commentary, J. Brown pointed out that a race is *vigorous* exercise. Christianity consists not in abstract speculations, enthusiastic feelings, or specious talk, but in directing all our energies into holy actions. It is a *laborious* exertion: the flesh, the world, the devil are like a fierce gale blowing against us, and only intense effort can overcome them. It is a *regulated* exertion: to run around in a circle is strenuous activity, but it will not bring us to the goal; we must follow strictly the prescribed course. It is

*progressive* exertion: there is to be a growth in grace, an adding to faith of virtue, etc. (~~GOING~~ 2 Peter 1:5-7), a reaching forth unto those things which are before.

“Let us *run* with patience the race that is set before us.” We only “run” when we are very anxious to get to a certain place, when there is some attraction stimulating us. That word “run” then presupposes the heart eagerly set upon the goal. That “goal” is complete deliverance from the power of indwelling sin, perfect conformity to the lovely image of Christ, entrance into the promised rest and bliss on High. It is only as *that* is kept steadily in view, only as faith and hope are in real and daily exercise, that we shall progress along the path of obedience. To look back will cause us to halt or stumble; to look down at the roughness and difficulties of the way will discourage and produce slackening, but to keep the prize in view will nerve to steady endeavor. It was thus our great Exemplar ran: “Who for the JOY *that was set before Him*” (verse 2).

But let us now consider, secondly, the means prescribed: “let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us.” That might be tersely expressed in several different forms: let us relinquish those things which would impede our spiritual progress; let us endeavor with might and main to overcome every hindering obstacle; let us attend diligently unto the way or method which will enable us to make the best speed. While sitting at our ease we are hardly conscious of the weight of our clothes, the articles held in our hands, or the cumbersome objects we may have in our pockets. But let us be aroused by the howlings of fierce animals, let us be pursued by hungry wolves, and methinks that none of us would have much difficulty in understanding the meaning of those words “let us lay aside every *weight!*”

“Let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us.” While no doubt each of these expressions has a definite and separate force, yet we are satisfied that a certain school of writers err in drawing too sharp and broad a line of distinction between them, for a careful examination of their contentions will show that the very things they consider to be merely “weights,” are, in reality, *sins*. The fact is that in most quarters there has been, for many years past, a deplorable lowering of the standard of Divine holiness, and numerous infractions of God’s righteous law have been wrongly termed “failures,” “mistakes,” and “minor blemishes,” etc. Anything which minimizes the reality and enormity of sin is to be

steadfastly resisted; anything which tends to excuse human “weaknesses” is to be rejected; anything which reduces that standard of absolute perfection which God requires us to constantly aim at — *every* missing of which is a *sin* — is to be shunned.

“Let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us” is parallel with,

“If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross” (~~4064~~ Matthew 16:24),

and “let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and of the spirit” (~~4070~~ 2 Corinthians 7:1). In other words, this dehortation is a calling upon the Christian to “mortify the deeds of the body” (~~4083~~ Romans 8:13), to “abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul” (~~4021~~ 1 Peter 2:11). There are two things which racers discard: all unnecessary burdens, and long flowing garments which would entangle them. Probably there is a reference to both of these in our text: the former being considered under “weights,” or those things we voluntarily encumber ourselves with, but which should be dropped; the latter, “the sin which doth so easily beset us” referring to inward depravity.

“Let us lay aside every weight” is a call to the sedulous and daily mortification of our hearts to all that would mar communion with Christ: it is parallel with “*denying* ungodliness and worldly lusts” (~~3422~~ Titus 2:12). Everything which requires us to take time and strength away from God-appointed duties, everything which tends to bind the mind to earthly things and hinders our affections from being set upon things above, is to be cheerfully relinquished for Christ’s sake. Everything which impedes my progress in running the race which God has set before me is to be dropped. But let it be carefully recognized that our text makes *no* reference to the dropping of *duties* which we have no right to lay aside. The performing of real and legitimate duty is never a hindrance to the spiritual life, though from a wrong attitude of mind and the allowance of the spirit of *discontent*, they often become so.

Many make a great mistake in entertaining the thought that their spiritual life is being much hindered by the very things which should, by Divine grace, be a real help to them. Opposition in the home from ungodly relatives, trials in connection with their daily work, the immediate presence of the wicked in the shop or office, are a real trial (and God intends they

*should* be — to remind us we are still in a world which lieth in the Wicked one, to exercise our graces, to prove the sufficiency of His strength), but they need not be hindrances or “weights.” Many erroneously suppose they would make much more progress spiritually if only their “circumstances” were altered. This is a serious mistake, and a murmuring against God’s providential dealings with us. *He* shapes our “circumstances” as a helpful discipline to the soul, and only as we learn to rise above “circumstances,” and walk with God in them, are we “running the race that is set before us.” The *person* is the same no matter what “circumstances” he may be in!

While the “weights” in our text have no reference to those duties which God requires us to discharge — for *He* never calls us to any thing which would draw us away from communion with Himself; yet they *do* apply in a very real sense unto a multitude of cares which many of God’s people *impose upon themselves* — cares which are a grievous drag upon the soul. The artificial state in which many people now live, which custom, society, the world, imposes, *does* indeed bind many heavy burdens on the backs of their silly victims. If we accept that scale of “duties” which the fashion of this world imposes, we *shall* find them “weights” which seriously impede our spiritual progress: spending valuable time in reading newspapers and other secular literature in order to “keep up with the times,” exchanging “social calls” with worldlings, spending money on all sorts of unnecessary things so as to be abreast of our neighbors, are “weights” burdening many, and those “weights” are *sins*.

By “weights,” then, may be understood every form of intemperance or the immoderate and hurtful use made of any of those things which God has given us “richly to *enjoy*” (<sup>5467</sup>1 Timothy 6:17). Yes, to “enjoy” be it noted, and not only to *use*. The Creator has placed many things in this world — like the beautiful flowers and the singing birds — for our pleasure, as well as for the bare supply of our bodily needs. This should be borne in mind, for there is a danger here, as every where, of lopsidedness. We are well aware that in this age of fleshly indulgence the majority are greatly in danger of erring on the side of laxity, yet in avoiding this sin, others are in danger of swinging to the other extreme and being “righteous over much” (<sup>2076</sup>Ecclesiastes 7:16), adopting a form of monastic austerity, totally abstaining from things which Scripture in nowise prohibits.

Each Christian has to decide for himself, by an honest searching of Scripture and an earnest seeking of wisdom from God, *what* are “weights”

which hinder *him*. While on the one hand it is wrong to assume an haughty and independent attitude, refusing to weigh in the balances of the sanctuary the conscientious scruples and prejudices of fellow-Christians; on the other hand it is equally wrong to suffer any to lord it over our consciences, and deprive us of our Christian liberty. “Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind.” It is not the lawful use of God’s creatures, but the intemperate abuse of them which Scripture condemns. More die from over eating than over drinking. Some constitutions are injured as much by coffee as by whiskey. Some are undermining their health by a constant round of exertions; others enervate themselves by spending too much time in bed.

The Greek word for “weights” is “tumor or swelling,” so that an excrescence, a superfluity, is what is in view. A “weight” is something which we are at liberty to cast aside, but which instead we choose to retain. It is anything which retards our progress, anything which unfits us for the discharge of our God-assigned duties, anything which dulls the conscience, blunts the edge of our spiritual appetite, or chokes the spirit of prayer. The “cares of this world” weigh down the soul just as effectually as does a greedy grasping after the things of earth. The allowance of the spirit of envy will be as injurious spiritually as would an attendance at the movies. Fellowshiping at a Christ-dishonoring “church” quenches that Spirit as quickly as would seeking diversion at the dance hall. The habit of gossiping may do more damage to the Spiritual life than the excessive smoking of tobacco.

One of the best indications that I *have* entered the race is the discovery that certain things, which previously never exercised my conscience, are a hindrance to me; and the further I “run,” the more conscious shall I be of the “weights”; and the more determined I am, by God’s grace, to reach the winning post, the more readily shall I drop them. So many professing Christians never seem to have any “weights,” and we never see them *drop* anything. Ah, the fact is, they have never entered the race. O to be able to say with Paul,

“I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord” (~~5088~~Philippians 3:8).

When this is true of us, we shall not find it difficult, but rather easy to obey that injunction,

“Go from the presence of a foolish man (or woman) when thou perceivest not in him the *lips* of knowledge” (<sup><2040></sup>Proverbs 14:7);

and so with many other scriptural exhortations.

“And the sin which doth so easily beset (Greek “encompass”) us.” As we have already pointed out, the writer regards the “weights” as external temptations which have to be resisted, evil habits which are to be dropped; and “the sin” as referring to indwelling corruption, with a special reference (as the whole context suggests) to the workings of *unbelief*: compare <sup><5813></sup>Hebrews 3:13. It is true that each of us has some special form of sin to which we are most prone, and that he is more sorely tempted from one direction than another; but we think it is very clear from all which precedes our text that what the apostle has particularly in mind here is that which most seeks to hinder the exercise of *faith*. Let the reader ponder <sup><4168></sup>John 16:8, 9.

“This is confirmed by the experience of all who have been exercised in this case, who have met with great difficulties in, and have been called to suffer for, the profession of the Gospel. Ask of them what they have found in such cases to be their most dangerous enemy; what hath had the most easy and frequent access unto their minds, to disturb and dishearten them, of the power thereof they have been most afraid; they will all answer with one voice, it is the evil of their own unbelieving hearts. This hath continually attempted to entangle them, to betray them, in taking part with all outward temptations. When this is conquered, all things are plain and easy unto them. It may be some of them have had their particular temptations which they may reflect upon; but any other evil by sin, which is *common unto them all, as this is*, they can fix on none” (John Owen).

But *how* is the Christian to “lay aside” indwelling sin and its particular workings of unbelief? This injunction is parallel with <sup><4042></sup>Ephesians 4:22, “That ye put off concerning the former conversation the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts.” And how is *that* to be done? By heeding the exhortation of <sup><4561></sup>Romans 6:11, 12, “Reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord. Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof.” In other words, by faith’s recognition of my legal oneness with Christ, and by drawing from His fullness. Indwelling sin is to be “laid aside” by daily mortification (<sup><45813></sup>Romans

8:13), by seeking grace to resist its solicitations (<sup><5011></sup>Titus 2:11, 12), by repenting, confessing, and forsaking the effects of its activities (<sup><1813></sup>Proverbs 28:13), by diligently using the means which God has provided for holy living (<sup><4516></sup>Galatians 5:16).

“Run *with patience* the race that is set before us.” Perseverance or endurance is the prime prerequisite for the discharge of this duty. The good-ground hearer brought forth fruit “with patience” (<sup><4815></sup>Luke 8:15). We are bidden to be “followers of those who through faith *and patience* inherit the promises” (<sup><5012></sup>Hebrews 6:12). The “race” appointed is a lengthy one, for it extends throughout the whole of our earthly pilgrimage. The course is narrow, and to the flesh, rough. The racer often becomes disheartened by the difficulties encountered. But

“Let us not be weary in well doing, for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not” (<sup><4819></sup>Galatians 6:9).

But how is this needed “patience” to be acquired? A twofold answer is given, the second part of which will be before us in the next article. First, by heeding the encouragement which is here set before us: “*Wherefore* seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses *let us* lay aside... *let us* run.” The reference is to the heroes of faith mentioned in the previous chapter: they compose a testimony for God, and speak unto future generations to be constant as they were. They witness to how noble a thing life may be when it is lived by faith. They witness to the faithfulness of God who sustained them, and enabled them to triumph over their foes, and overcome their difficulties. In likening these numerous witnesses unto a “cloud” there is no doubt a reference unto the Cloud which guided Israel in the wilderness: they *followed* it all the way to Canaan! So must we follow the noble example of the O.T. saints in their faith, obedience, and perseverance.

“Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, *let us*.” This is mentioned as an incentive, to console and assure us we are not alone. As we look around at the empty profession on every side, and behold the looseness and laxity of so many who bear the name of Christ, Satan seeks to make us believe that we are wrong, too “strict,” and rebukes us for our “singularity.” No doubt he employed the same tactics with Noah, with Abraham, with Moses; but they heeded him not. Nor should we. We are *not* “singular”: if faithful to Christ we are following “the footsteps of the flock” (<sup><2108></sup>Song of Solomon 1:8). Others before us have

trod the same path, met with the same hindrances, fought the same fight. *They* persevered, conquered, and won the crown: then “*let us* run.” That is the thought and force of the opening words of our text.

“We who have still to walk in the narrow path which alone leads to glory are encouraged and instructed by the cloud of witnesses, the innumerable company of saints, who testified amid the most varied circumstances of suffering and temptation, that the just live by *faith*, and that faith is the victory which overcometh the world. The memory of those children of God, whose lives are recorded for our learning and consolation, animates us, and we feel upheld as it were by their sympathy and by the consciousness, that although few and weak, strangers and pilgrims on earth, we belong to a great and mighty, nay, a victorious army, part of which has already entered into the land of peace” (Adolph Saphir).