

Laying Aside the Weight

Hebrews 12:1-2

“Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, ² looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.”

In my mind, the author of the book of Hebrews would be right at home in front of a big screen television watching the Super Bowl, the World Series, or some other sporting event. Why? The first few verses of Hebrews 12 seem to be written by someone who has participated in or familiar with athletics. **Because of that knowledge we are introduced to a powerful athletic metaphor in which the Christian life is compared to a race.**

If you know Jesus then you are a participant. You are already running, whether you realize it or not. The issue is not *if* we are running but *how* we are running.

In our last study we saw that the Holy Spirit works in us to bring our consciousness or awareness into the realm of the Spirit. Satan works from without (through of flesh desires) to keep us in bondage to this world. One of Satan’s greatest strategies is to **cause us not to see our selves as God sees us!**

This truth is made crystal clear in the lives of the children of Israel. After searching out the Promised Land they acknowledged its bounty, but then made this confession in Numbers 13:33, “And we were in our own sight as grasshoppers, and so we were in their sight.” The key to their failure is found in their own confession, “And we were in our own sight as grasshoppers...”

The reason the Israelites were so terrified to fight the giants in Canaan was *not* because those giants were so big. It was because the Israelites saw themselves as so *small!* It was what they were *in their own sight* that defeated them.

This same thing is true for we as believers. It is what you are in your own sight that will make the difference. If, see yourself as a weak, powerless Christian, *the devil will have not trouble keeping you in bondage to worldly pleasures and fleshy desires.*

How does the devil see you? Does he see you as a *terrifying* and *mighty warrior* of God, or does he see you as a *wimp he can whip in a minute?* The reason that we are out of focus to who we really are in Christ Jesus is because *we have allowed ourselves to become sidetracked from the things of God!*

Therefore, Bible tells us in 2 Corinthians 6:16 & 7:1 that if a man will purge himself of sin, he will be a vessel of honor prepared for every good work. Notice who does the purging, "And what agreement has the temple of God with idols? for you are the temple of the living God: as God has said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them: and I will be their God, and they shall be my people...Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God." **How do we cleanse ourselves?** We do so by "agreeing with God" concerning those things in our lives that are sin, as seen in 1 John 1:9, "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."

This truth is shown for us in another way in James 1:13-15, "Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither does He tempt any man: But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away because of his own lust, and enticed. Then when lust has conceived, it developes into sin: and sin, when it is finished, brings forth death."

The scripture says that we are "tempted" when we are "drawn away." Drawn away from what? From God! As new creatures in Christ, our inner man wants to do the will of God. Our hearts want to please Him and to do what is right in His sight. However, we have to contend with the temptations of the "flesh."

The word most often associated with "the flesh" is the term "lust." In our thinking "lustful" thoughts is connected with the sensual or immoral. But in the Greek, the word simply means "strong desire." The lust of the flesh is simply the strong desire to follow after the ways of the world, rather than God. For instance, a lust for money, or success, or power, etc., can pull you away from God.

Please do not misunderstand what I am saying here, because it is certainly acceptable to have a desire for success, to a desire to obtain an education or career, or to be recognized in your profession. These "wants" are absolutely permissible if they are put in their proper perspective and do not draw us away from our commitments to the Lord. In other words, our "strong desire" must be for God.

It is a biblical fact that our heavenly Father wants us to be successful. On the other hand, Jesus said, "What does it profit a man if he gains the whole world and loses his soul?"

We do not want to be drawn away through fleshly desires. John 17:16 tells us that we can walk and function in this world without being married to it. As believers we are already citizens of the kingdom of heaven. We are not of this world.

In the past we were debtors to the flesh. But today, God is calling us to set our affection on things above. He wants us to give our attention to the things of the Spirit so that we can dominate the world around us with the love and power of God. God has patiently waited for the Church. It is time for His power and glory to be manifested, as it has never been before!

I believe that that God has told me three things that Mountain Grove Church must do to move in the flow of the Holy Spirit. (1) We must purge ourselves of sin. (2) We must intercede for others. (3) We must prepare for criticism.

Romans 8:11-14 tells us, "The Spirit of God, who raised Jesus from the dead, lives in you. And just as God raised Christ Jesus from the dead, he will give life to your mortal bodies by this same Spirit living within you. Therefore, dear brothers and sisters, you have no obligation to do what your sinful nature urges you to do. For if you live by its dictates, you will die. But if through the power of the Spirit you put to death the deeds of your sinful nature, you will live. For all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God." **Ladies and gentlemen, as children of children of God we are walking, mobile temples of the Holy Spirit!** **God has promised,** "I will be a Father to them, I will dwell in them and walk in them."

The same Spirit that raised Jesus from the dead will raise you from the bondage of a mortal body. He has given us life when we were saved, and wants to give us the power to overcome the "flesh." But we must be sensitive to sensitive the the leading of the Holy Spirit and ever conscious of His presence.

Look once more at Romans 12:1-2, "And so, dear brothers and sisters, I plead with you to give your bodies to God because of all he has done for you. Let them be a living and holy sacrifice - the kind he will find acceptable. This is truly the way to worship him. Don't copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will learn to know God's will for you, which is good and pleasing and perfect."

This scripture is talking about crucifying the flesh as seen in Galatians 5: 24,28, "And they that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts...If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in

the Spirit." **We are admonished to offer our body as a living sacrifice.** We are to lay aside **our own natural desires** in order to fulfill **God's desire**. Wuest's translation says that we are to "place our bodies at the disposal of God."

According to the Bible this is our "reasonable service." **This might seem unreasonable to some.** Why is it our "reasonable service"? Because Jesus gave His body a living sacrifice for us. We have been "bought with a price" and 1 Corinthians 6:19-20 tells us that we are to "glorify God in our bodies and in our spirits."

Child of God, there is a decision to be made. Are you going to serve your own interests? Or, are you going to serve the Lord Jesus? **As pastor of this great church, I believe we are going to decide to offer ourselves as a living sacrifice.** And when we do, you are going to find that the Christian life truly is "joy unspeakable and full of glory."

Before you experienced the new birth, your body was at liberty to enjoy evil pleasures of this world. You were dominated by outward influences. But Hebrews 5:13-14 tells us, "For everyone who partakes *only* of milk *is* unskilled in the word of righteousness, for he is a babe. But solid food belongs to those who are of full age, *that is*, those who by reason of use have their senses exercised (or through practice) to discern both good and evil."

As a new Christian it isn't easy at first, but through practice (or making wise decisions), your body will discern the difference between good and evil. It is not a thing you have to fight. If you walk in the spirit, when temptation comes, the Holy Spirit will reveal to you the truth of a situation. This truth is shown to us in 2 Corinthians 10:5, "Casting down imaginations, and every high things that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bring into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ." When an **evil thought**, or an **ungodly attitude**, develops, then it is our responsibility to deal with it immediately! **It is a biblical truth that the more you walk in the Spirit, the more your body is affected and brought under obedience to God!**

Child of God, God wants the Church transformed into the image of Jesus!! He wants us to control and dominate the physical world around us. When your body is made a living sacrifice, God will be revealed in you!

If you have never received Jesus Christ as your personal Savior, why not today?

Everyone please stand for prayer.

Father,

Give me a fresh source of power in my life that will allow me to keep on, to never give up, and to keep trusting in You even when I don't understand. Give me the courage to stay on the course of commitment and service to live for You no matter what. In Jesus' name. Amen.