

Besetting Sin

by Bob Jennings

Bob Jennings discusses the pervasive issue of besetting sin in the life of a Christian and emphasizes the need for active resistance and reliance on God's strength to overcome it.

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Scripture: Hebrews 12:1

Topics: "Besetting Sin", "Overcoming Sin", "Spiritual Warfare"

Description

Bob Jennings emphasizes the critical nature of besetting sin in the life of a Christian, urging believers to recognize and confront the persistent sins that hinder their spiritual progress. He highlights the importance of laying aside every weight and sin, as mentioned in Hebrews 12:1, and encourages a radical and persistent approach to overcoming these strongholds. Jennings warns that tolerating such sins can lead to spiritual death and a loss of assurance in one's faith. He calls for courage and faith in God to achieve victory over these sins, reminding the congregation of the power of Christ's sacrifice to deliver them from all iniquity.

Transcript

Heavenly Father, here we are in the battle of the ages. Here we are, Lord, to present ourselves again to you this morning as soldiers of Christ, soldiers of the cross. We bless you, Lord, that you've ever called us unto yourself, that you've called us to stand by your side, you've called us to be followers of you, you've called us, Lord, to put on the armor of God, you've called us to wield the sword of the Spirit, that you've called us to be clothed with the armor of righteousness on the right hand and on the left and do battle for you as men of God, women of God, and that you've been pleased, Lord, to put us into your service, that we might have a part in advancing your kingdom, that we might have a part in dealing blows to the strongholds of the enemy, that we might have a real part in furthering the gospel.

Lord, here we are in the battle. Here we are, Lord, in a world that is perishing, a world that is dying, a world with souls that are perishing in their sins. With nations falling and shaking, with cities being uprooted, our communities are held by the power of sin this morning.

And we long, Lord, that you'd clothe us with your Holy Spirit, that you'd use these days that we might go back to our communities and to our churches and that we might see our communities move for your holy name. We ask, Lord, then you'd be pleased to continue to equip us for the battle, arm us with jealous cares in thy sight to live, thy servants, Lord, prepare a strict account to give. We bless your name, Lord,

we admit thine is the victory, the glory, the majesty, now and forever.

Amen. Open your Bibles with me, please, to Hebrews chapter 12. Hebrews chapter 12.

Shall we read the first four verses? Wherefore, seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, 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 is set down at the right hand of the throne of God. For consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds. Ye have not yet resisted unto blood, striving against sin.

We know that Christ and him crucified is central to the gospel, but there wouldn't be any need for a Messiah and his work if there weren't one thing that it presupposes, namely, the need which is sin. I'd like to speak to you this morning on sin. You walk, you talk to the man on the streets, and his supreme problem that that man is facing is sin.

You look at the baby in the cradle, and the supreme problem that that child is facing and will face is sin. You go to the nursing home and talk to that elderly person, and the supreme problem that that soul is facing is sin. You go to the insane asylum, and the chief problem that that person is facing is sin.

The supreme problem of the human race is sin. I'd like to speak on sin this morning. However, not the sin of omission, as James 4.17 speaks of, not the sin of commission, as 1 John 3.4 speaks of, not the sin of doubt, as Romans 14 identifies, not the sin of presumption, as Psalm 19 speaks of, but rather the sin of Hebrews 12, verse 1, namely, the besetting sin.

Sometimes the Bible takes us to the battlefield that we might be reminded as soldiers of the sacrifice and the hardship that is involved. Sometimes the Bible takes us to the wheat field that we might learn patience like farmers. Sometimes the Bible takes us to the sports field that we might learn discipline like the athlete.

And here we are in this passage. We've been taken to the arena, the sports arena and the arena of faith. Here we find then a great cloud of witnesses, those witnesses of Hebrews 11.

And they're not watching us like spectators, but they're speaking to us. They're crying out to us like cheerleaders to press on, to go along with God and to believe God no matter what's facing you and be a victor over sin. Here we are in the race of life.

It speaks of this race, to run the race with patience, the race that is set before us and to lay aside every weight that would hold us down. You look at a runner and you don't see a runner with a lot of extra pounds on him. He's skinny as a rail.

He doesn't even want to have any weight on his feet. He doesn't wear socks. He doesn't want to have any weight on his legs.

He wears gym trunks, naked trunks is the Greek word. Anything that would hinder our spiritual progress is to be laid aside, as one man said. The Christian self-denial should bear not only on the guilty pleasures, but on every habit or pleasure or enjoyment which, although it may not be vicious, nevertheless robs us of spiritual strength and time.

We go out for a recreation and we come back a lot of times finding it was just dissipation, right? But not only to lay aside these weights, but he specifically says, now lay aside this sin which so easily besets us. I'm not totally convinced in my own mind whether this is talking about just sin in general, but I have taken it before and I take it now as referring to a besetting a specific sin. The besetting sin is what I want to talk about this morning.

That is a sin that is persistent and predominant and deep-rooted and continually in evidence in my life. A stronghold sin in my life as a Christian. So let's look at three things pertaining to the besetting sin.

Number one, the problem of a besetting sin for the Christian. Number two, the nature of a besetting sin for the Christian. And number three, the cost of tolerating a besetting sin as a professing Christian.

The problem, first, of a besetting sin. Here you are, you're a Christian, you see? And you've had victory, substantial victory over sin. By definition, that's what a Christian is.

As Brother Leiter just preached to us, he is born of God, overcomes. You've got substantial victory over sin if you're a Christian. But here's this one sin that continues to bug you and plague you and hang on to you again and again and again and day after day after day and week after week.

A besetting sin. And you hate it because you're regenerate. You hate sin by nature, but yet you pity it and you pamper it and you play around with it and you put up with it and you plead for it, like Abraham did Ishmael, like Lot did for Zohar.

And you protect it like Jacob did for Benjamin and make excuses for it. You know it's there. And yet you won't lay it aside like the Bible says, lay aside every weight and the sin which does so easily beset us.

You know it's there and you know others know it's there and yet you won't lay it aside. And you know God knows it's there and yet you won't lay it aside. And it's defiling your conscience and yet you won't lay it aside like the Bible commands you.

And it's depleting your spiritual strength and yet you won't lay it aside like the Bible commands you. You won't kick it out. You won't pluck it out.

You won't put it off. A besetting sin, the problem of a besetting sin. Second, consider the nature of a besetting sin.

It's the very same as any other sin. All sin is sin. I'll just point out two things about the of a besetting sin and really of all sin.

One thing, it deceives. Hebrews chapter 3 speaks of the deceitfulness of sin. You think in this matter of a besetting sin that initially you realize that it is sin.

I mean, God has spoken to you and it's come to you in the Bible and it's come to you from the pulpit and it's coming to you in your conscience that yes, that's sin. It is, it's wrong for me to have and hold this thing. But you don't deal with it right away.

And you dabble around with it and play on with it. And eventually you think there's nothing wrong with that. And you eventually you think that you've even got a right to have just one sin.

Yeah, everybody's got a right to have a besetting sin and a little problem of some kind. And so you go along with that and you think eventually you start defending that thing. And eventually, and I've heard it, eventually you start even bragging on your besetting sin.

I've heard men brag on their sin. What's going on in their mind to brag about that thing? I say it's deceptive. You start out knowing it's wrong and don't deal with it and you end up bragging about it.

You see it coming to you and you extend your hand to shake its hand like a joab and it ends up in the end jabbing you under the fifth rib. You let that sin kiss you like Judas and it eventually ends up betraying you and destroying you. It is possible, Revelation 3, 17, to think that you're rich in the things of God and yet you don't know that you're poor and blind and wretched and miserable and naked.

You don't know. The worst thing about a deceived person is that he doesn't know it. The worst thing about a man that can't see is that he can't see.

And so James 1.22 says, let's be not just hearers of the word but doers of the word. Let's be deluded ourselves. And another thing about the nature of a besetting sin and of all sin is that it not only deceives.

Hebrews 3 says, lest any of you be hardened due to the deceitfulness of sin. Hardened. You know what it is? Maybe you do.

Take that body putty and fix a rough spot in the car. Here's a can of putty and you take some out and you take this here tube of chemical and squeeze a little of that out into the putty and stir it around. You stir it around, stir it around and eventually, gradually, it starts getting harder and harder and harder and it's hard, finally.

And that's the way it is with sin. Soft choices lead to hard hearts. You better not count on victory someday.

You don't know the end of sin. You don't know the latter end of sin. You don't know where it's going to stop.

The Bible speaks of a conscience being seared or becoming calloused. At the beginning, we realized that that was sin and it was ugly and hateful. And whenever we'd do it and commit it, that needle on our conscience would register and register and go way over.

But now you become used to it and become hardened to it and calloused to it and now it's just a little bit left. Just the needle just moves a little bit and it's scary. You remember Balaam? God gave him a clear word at the beginning, what was right and what was wrong.

But he overrode that command of the Lord, that revelation of the Lord, and bucked through it. And eventually, it was like God was saying to him, go on then. And he thought it was right and went to hell because of it.

The only hope you've got, brethren, is to be right now sensitive to every prompting of the Holy Spirit that you've got upon you and cherish every rebuke that comes to you, whether by the Spirit of God or a brother in Christ, and respond to it now, not then, because you're liable to be hardened a month down the road and think it's all right to go on with your besetting sin. Third, the cost of tolerating a besetting sin. Death is still the wages of sin, whether it's a besetting sin or any sin.

A besetting sin, it's still the same thing. You're going to experience death in some form or another, whether it's disease or disappointment or discouragement or despair, depression, it's death in some form or another. You go up to the paymaster and there at the window you stand after a week's wickedness, and what does he pay you? He pays you in death.

In some way or another, you're going to experience death to whatever degree of sin you commit. He who sows to the flesh reaps corruption. But Samuel Rutherford put it well.

He said, don't think that you and your idle sins can go to heaven together. You either kill it or it'll kill you. You don't have any reason to think if you're going on in a known sin day after day after day that you're a Christian.

I mean, it's going to zap you, rob you of your assurance in some measure, if not totally. We're going to have to either bow to the scepter of God's authority and deal with that sin or else bow to his rod and be judged by it. It's either the scepter or the rod.

Remember Saul, King Saul? He didn't destroy Amalek according to the will of God, and so Amalek ended up destroying him. You play with a snake and you're going to get bit by it. You dance around the pit and you're going to fall into it.

Think of what the Bible tells us by way of testimony as to the effect of tolerating one sin, committing one sin. Lot's wife was judged because of one sin. Ananias and Sapphira were judged because of one sin.

The rich young ruler went to hell because of one sin. One thing you lack, Jesus said. Adam and Eve, because of one sin, plunged the whole human race into death and misery.

A besetting sin, brethren, is sin. And the Bible says without holiness no man will see the Lord. The Bible declares that God is light and in him is no darkness at all.

And the Christian is called to walk in the light as he's in the light. That means to entertain no darkness at all. I mean, a Christian by definition is a person who's walking with a clear, clean conscience.

That's my boast. I don't know of any sin on my conscience right now. No known sin.

Yes, you've got a whole bunch of unknown sin. You're not perfectly sanctified yet and we won't be until we get to heaven. But our boast and our joy and our confidence is that we can walk without any known sin, with a clear, clean slate.

But here you are with a besetting sin that's bothering you day after day after day. And I say this, or rather you might say, yes, but I'm trusting the blood of Christ to cover all my sins. I say unto you, if you're dabbling, if you're having a problem with a besetting sin, you don't have any reason.

Or I'll say it this way, you are robbed of full assurance of saying you're a Christian unless you are actively, violently fighting, struggling, striving against that sin. That's your only hope, that you've got any assurance of thinking you're a Christian and the blood of Christ is going to cover all your sins. Is that if you're fighting against that besetting sin, according to Hebrews 12, verse 4, striving against sin.

Lord, I know I'm doing this, I know I've got a problem with it, I know it's got a hold on me, there's a stronghold in my life, but I hate it and I'm fighting against it and would you please deliver me from it. That's the only way you've got any assurance that you are a Christian and that the blood of Christ is covering

your sins. At the very least, it is going to mar your testimony.

It is marring your testimony and hindering your usefulness, if in fact you are a Christian. Here you are with this beautiful garment, it's beautiful, but it's just got this one stain on it and because of that one stain, you can't use it. Here you've got this precious ointment, valuable, but because of one dead fly, you can't use it.

I worked for a while with a seed corn company and they had charts, all figured out how much yield it would cost you to just have one weed for every ten foot of row. I wonder how much fruitfulness, just one sin in our life is going to hinder our yield for God. It robs us of our spiritual strength.

You just let the faucet drip one time per second and at the end of the day, you've lost nine gallons. You let a faucet leak one thirty second of an inch and for three months, in three months time, you've lost 18,500 gallons of water. What is it? What's this one sin costing you? With regard to spiritual usefulness and spiritual strength, plug up the leaks in your vessel, brother.

Remember the effects of one sin. Because of one sin, Moses was kept out of the promised land. Because of one sin, the Abraham sin, we've got all this mess in the Middle East, so to speak, or indirectly.

Because of one sin, David lost peace in his house and the sword didn't depart thereafter. Because of one sin, Noah helped to bring a curse on his children. And so this one sin is affecting you.

It's affecting you. You can't shine the way you ought. You can't look people in the eye the way you ought.

You can't regice the way you ought. You're not free the way you ought to be and could be as a Christian. It's affecting you.

It's affecting your ministry. It's affecting your family. It's affecting your church.

Because of one sin, Achan's sin, all Israel is defeated. What are you doing dabbling around with that sin? Maybe that's what it means, the mystery of iniquity. It's a mystery why we fiddle around with sin when it costs us so much.

In closing, I exhort you, brothers and sisters, to be a perfectionist on yourself. Be a perfectionist. Give the others a whole bunch of slack.

Give them some slack, but be a perfectionist on yourself. You take a piano player, and here she's got this beautiful piece of music, and she can play it beautifully, all except for this one hard spot. Well, what does she do? Go to the concert with it that way and let that dead fly spoil the ointment? No.

Ahead of time, she works on it and works on it and works on that hard spot until it shines like the rest of it. And then she can present it with brilliance. You take the Olympic athlete, and the coach comes up and says to him, you could win that crown if you just work on this one thing.

If you just deal with that and get victory in that one area, you can win that crown. And he does. He works on it.

He concentrates on it. He deals with it. He focuses in on it until he's got it down.

And he does it for a corruptible crown. And here we are talking about an incorruptible crown, eternal weights of glory. Surely we ought, like the athlete, to discipline our lives for the purpose of godliness,

which holds a promise for the life that now is, and for that which is to come.

Samuel Rutherford, to quote him again, he said we ought to make growth in grace a priority above everything else in our lives. Isn't conformity to Christ, isn't dealing with sin, isn't laying aside sin and falling in love with him, isn't that sinful in your life as a Christian? Secondly, I exhort you to be courageous. Take courage.

Rise up. Be courageous in this striving against sin. What is your besetting sin, if you have one? Maybe it's late to bed and late to rise.

Maybe it's prayerlessness. Maybe it's gluttony. Maybe it's silly talk.

Maybe it's laziness. Or some other form of lust. I don't know what it is.

I don't need to know. But by definition of the besetting sin, you know what it is. Whatever it is, there it stands before you like a Goliath, defying the power of the living Christ.

And are you going to let that thing, blaspheme the name of the Lord? Why not rise up and take courage and like David, hit it in the head? Or like David, do with it like he did to the Jebusites. Let's look at that testimony in 1 Chronicles 11. He did not come hither.

Nevertheless, David took the castle of Zion, which is the city of David. Here's the devil. Or here you are.

You have this victory and that victory and the other victory in Canaan's fair and happy land. You've tasted of the milk and the honey. You've seen them routed out.

But here's this stronghold, the stronghold of the Jebusites. And they're saying to you, you shall not come here. You're not going to take this one.

You're not going to conquer this one. There's no victory over this one. You're not coming in here.

And there's the devil saying that to you like those Jebusites. But look at the next word. Nevertheless.

Nevertheless, David took it. He came in. It didn't faze him a bit.

We're going to take it like we took the rest of them. Courage. Take heart.

Remember the example of David and the Jebusites. Thirdly, be radical to find victory over your besetting sin. Be radical.

Again, I like David's words in Psalm 18. He said, I pursued my enemies and I overtook them. I did not turn back until they were shattered and they fell at my feet and were unable to rise.

Remember what he did to Goliath. He not only hit him in the head, but he took the sword and cut his head off. And make sure he wasn't going to rise up.

Radical. I shattered them so they were unable to rise. Don't play around with it.

Don't go for a half victory. Don't pamper it. Here's a man with a problem with gluttony and obesity.

And what does he do? He goes off on some weight watchers or partial diet instead of being radical and going right to the root of it and plucking the weed out by the root. Why not declare a fast? Why not run up

the red with a white flag and deal with it? You take a doctor that prescribes the pills. Isn't this right, Dr. Campbell? He prescribes these pills and he says, make sure you patient, make sure that you take them all.

Don't just take half the bottle and then quit. You're liable to have a relapse. Take all the pills and make sure that all of them are killed.

Be radical. Number four, be persistent to gain victory over your besetting sin. Be persistent.

You've got a sore on your arm or whatever. It's not enough to put the ointment on just one day. You've got to keep applying it and applying it and applying it and be regular and persistent every day until it's healed.

Keep at it. Keep on it. Deal with it.

Another thing, if you want victory over a besetting sin is be vigilant. Remember the example of the Syrians in 1 Kings chapter 20. Here the Lord, unbelievably, had given King Ahab, the wicked man that he was, victory over the Syrians in Ben-Hadad.

And what happened? The prophet came to Ahab and he said, you go and strengthen yourself because they're coming back at the turn of the year. That's the way with the devil. He left the Lord until an opportune time.

Make sure, watch out, be vigilant. Because it's coming back to try and get in again and get a foothold on you. And if it does, it's liable to be seven times worse than it was the first time.

What we're saying, brethren, is to be all out for God. All out for Him. And be violent in the things of the kingdom.

Radical in the pursuit of the Lord and in the matters of holiness. You don't know how consecrated you really are until you gain victory over that besetting sin. Until you fight under the heat of the battles on.

And you don't know the riches that the Lord has for you until you deal with that besetting sin. The riches of peace and glory and goodness and gladness. You don't know the riches that the Lord has for you until all on the altar is laid.

I one time was told the story, I guess, of Genghis Khan. And here that man was going through the land, sweeping through the land with his army, taking one city after another. And they came to this one city.

And there they'd taken it all except this one temple, Buddhist temple or whatever it was. And they got into that temple and there they went into the inner sanctuary. And there they found those priests all bobbed down around this here mighty idol.

And the main, the head priest, he rose up and he came to that great leader and he pleaded with that leader, take everything, take anything, but would you just spare this one? And the leader at first, he said, all right. But then he thought again and said, no, cut her down. And they knocked that idol and split it wide open and there came up buckets of jewels.

And that's the way with the Lord. If he can just keep one stronghold sin in our life, he knows that he's holding back riches of the Lord from us. Finally, to have victory over a besetting sin, it just means believing God.

Have faith in God. That's what all those witnesses were crying out in Hebrews chapter 11. By faith, by faith, by faith, have faith in God.

And really, what sin is it that's too big for the Lord? Isn't that why the Lord came, was to set his people free from their sins? Doesn't it say in Titus 2.14, he gave himself for us that he might redeem us and deliver us from all iniquity, every lawless deed, and to purify for himself a people zealous of good works. 2 Timothy 4.18, the Lord will deliver me from every lawless deed and preserve me unto his heavenly kingdom. I mean, it says every.

It says all. Isn't there power in the blood to deal with that thing that seems so impossible in your life, that seems unconquerable in your life? Isn't God sufficient? Isn't the Lord sufficient? Isn't the blood, isn't the cross sufficient for that? Really, what you're doing by putting up, by tolerating a besetting sin in your life, in a measure, you're blaspheming, you're insulting the cross of Christ. And Brother Leiter has been preaching the doctrine of regeneration.

And what does it mean if it doesn't mean this, that there's victory over sin no matter what it is? The Lord's given us a new heart, and now it's only natural to be free from sin, only natural to fight against sin, only natural to see those sins drop off. It's the natural thing. That's the way God has wired us up.

And so you don't need it. You don't need to put up with it. You don't need to tolerate it.

You don't need to go on with it. There is victory. It's right at your fingertips.

It's real in you already. Believe God. Cash in on it.

Write out the check that God has laid out there before you. Fill it in. Only natural.

If you've tasted that the Lord is gracious, here, what is that grace teaching you? Titus 2.11 says that the grace of God has appeared teaching you, actively teaching you to deny ungodliness and worldly loss, to live soberly, righteously and godly in this present world. That's what grace does. Think of the promises of God.

Oh, exceeding great and precious promises that we might be partakers of his divine nature, that we might be conformed to the image of Christ. He said we're more than conquerors to him who loved us. He made us kings and priests unto him.

If we're kings, why don't we gain the dominion and possess our possessions and inherit the promises? It's there for us as Christians. Think of this text, how it says to deal with sin. It says in some places that we just need to avoid sin.

In other places it says we need to flee from sin. But here in our text it says lay aside sin. Just like a book when you're done with it, or like your shoes when you take them off.

You just lay them aside. The other day I was walking through the woods and there a branch got tangled up in my shoestrings and I couldn't walk with that thing there, let alone run, and so I had to stop and reach down and take it out and lay it aside. And that's what the Lord wants us to do with our sins.

Lay them aside. You set them aside. I don't want it anymore.

I'm tired of it. I'm sick of it. I've had enough.

I want to be holy like him. A. W. Tozer says, many run well, but few run well to the end. What a thing.

Could it be true? Don't you want to run a good race? Don't you want to finish the course with joy? Don't you want to fight a good fight? Don't you want to end with making your deathbed pillow soft with a holy life? Oh, then we ought to rise up and press the battle air. The night shall veil the glowing skies. Rise up and run the race.

Rise up and look to Jesus. How did he deal with sin? How did he face the problem of sin? How was it? Well, he had cost him his lifeblood in dealing with sin. He had to die for sin.

And so it says we ought to look to him. He's the pioneer. He's the leader.

He's going on ahead, following his steps, and do whatever it takes to deal with that sin. Here we are. We're in the race of life.

We're talking about the dangers of being disqualified. We're talking about rules, the rules of the game. We're talking about time element.

We want to run as far as we can on the race of holiness before we die and our stewardship is taken away. We're talking about incorruptible crowns and goals and glories beyond anything that we can imagine. Well, let's get on with it.

Amen. Break down every idol. Cast out every foe.

Be whiter, much whiter than snow. May the Lord help us. Amen.

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