

# Hindrances

by Harmon A. Baldwin

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*Spiritual sloth is a state of being where one is overcome with laziness and indifference towards seeking holiness and a deeper relationship with God, and it can be overcome by recognizing the enemy's suggestions, resisting them, and seeking holiness with determination and faith.*

**Scripture:** Proverbs 13:4, Matthew 7:7, Luke 1:73, John 17:20, 1 Corinthians 10:12, Ephesians 3:16, 1 Thessalonians 5:23, Hebrews 10:36, Revelation 3:20

**Topics:** "Spiritual Growth", "Christian Holiness"

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## Description

Harmon A. Baldwin preaches about the struggle experienced in seeking holiness, emphasizing the spiritual sloth and indifference that hinder individuals from pursuing the greatest boon granted by God. Signs of spiritual sloth include lack of interest in prayer, absence of desire for God's house, indifference towards the salvation of others, procrastination, and the temptation to wait for a more 'favorable' time. Baldwin encourages believers to overcome laziness, half-hearted seeking, and the enemy's deceptive suggestions by earnestly seeking holiness, resisting distractions, and holding themselves up against the clear light of heaven.

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## Transcript

When clear light begins to shine on the heart of the candidate for holiness, a great struggle is often experienced in getting definitely at the work. Sloth and indifference bind the soul as with fetters of brass. Persons who in other matters could rightfully repudiate the charge of laziness are so overcome with spiritual sloth that they put off seeking for the greatest boon ever granted to man, for even years; or at best, they seek only indifferently. Of course, it is hard for them to realize that this is their true condition; but it is, nevertheless.

Nearly everybody is naturally lazy in some particular. The boy whom the farmer calls lazy is by the school teacher considered the most studious boy in the school, and vice versa. Set one to doing the things he likes to do, and he will work hard, while in other matters he works sluggishly. No one likes to delve down through the strata of carnality to press his way against sloth, indifference, and his own moral inertia, and force the matter to an issue. It goes "against the grain." You may set before his mind the most glorious promises of God's word, and the richest, juiciest fruits of Canaan as his, if he will seek, and still the dead weight of his own soul will hinder him until he will be forced to "storm the gates of strife," if he makes any headway, and will feel that like Samson, he has the gates of Gaza on his back; and also that, like Reuben, his strength is "unstable as water." Let us note some of the signs of spiritual sloth.

1. Lack of interest in prayer. The duty of prayer appears to be irksome; time thus spent drags heavily, and the secret place is left with an almost unconscious sigh of relief with gladness that the duty is done. Then the man will plunge into business with a zest that convinces every one of his earnestness.

2. Another sign of sloth is absence of desire for and delight in the house of God. If in this state you can easily find excuses for absence from prayer and class meetings.

3. Indifference about the salvation of one's friends and neighbors, and that to such an extent that we seldom, if ever, call on them, or pray with them when we do call, or even mention the salvation of their souls, also arises from spiritual sloth. One can see the vineyard of God lying waste, growing up to weeds, and the stone wall thereof crumbling in ruins, and feel little concern. Such souls think the preacher and class leader ought to work harder, and criticize them for their lack of effort, while doing nothing themselves.

4. Procrastination indicates a slothful spirit. When the slothful soul attends holiness meetings he fears lest an altar call be given or a test proposed; and if the call is given, he says inwardly, "I want the experience, but the effort to obtain it is too great, I will wait till some other time." A lazy man generally intends to do the thing required, but the effort to do it now is too great, and he is only waiting till he feels like it; and, meanwhile, he dies a pauper, and is buried in the potter's field.

5. One great ruse of the enemy to induce people to delay is to suggest that they must wait the Lord's time. That they must in this way be taught some new lesson or killed out to a hurried spirit. What strange things the enemy of souls can get us to believe! When the soul is cleansed it will then be dead to both carnal hurry and carnal sloth. This idea of waiting is virtually an attempt to deliver ourselves independent of the blood; to get the work done without the trouble of getting God's help; to bring about the end desired without using the God-appointed means; expecting something to "turn up," looking for our fortunes on the sidewalk instead of rolling up our sleeves and making them. Draggers are below par in this world; we need pushers; and especially is this true in religious matters in this Laodicean age. Oh, this round of waiting, wishing, hoping, expecting, desiring, but never obtaining! Quit it now, lay hold of the promises, and your legal years will be ended. God says, "Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation." Avail thyself of his blessing now by faith and hope.

As Wesley says,

You shall not be disappointed of your hope; it will come and will not tarry. Look for it every day, every hour, every moment. Why not this hour -- this moment? Certainly you may look for it now, if you believe it is by faith. This same temptation is sometimes presented in another form, with the suggestion that some other time will do. The fact that the soul is saved, has peace with God, and feels no condemnation, is liable to be used as an excuse for lack of immediate action. Condemnation would be an incentive to action, but the very assurance of safety is liable to be used as a plank to slide into indifference or open rebellion. Apply Wesley's translation of 1 Cor. 10: 12 to your case: 'Let him that assuredly standeth take heed lest he fall.'

Opportunities fly like the wind, and must be caught in passing or they are gone forever. God says, "Now is the accepted time." Do you believe what God says? Then act accordingly. There is little room for doubt that the longer you stand in the place you now occupy the harder it will be to pray out. If your soul is in a growing condition it is well, and you will, it may be, keep approaching the prize; but the time will come sooner or later when you must put forth an extra effort or you will settle back into a hard, calloused condition which it will take all the powers of your being to break through. So the wise thing is to take the

present as the best opportunity and see to it that the work is done.

6. Another plan taken by the carnal heart to keep one from facing the issue is to induce him to look and wait for a more favorable opportunity. This is a common trouble and one which must be guarded against. When in meeting, an altar call is given, the suggestion comes, "Wait till you get home." When at home "the cares of this life" come pressing in, and hour after hour passes, and the earnestness and determination felt in meeting are soon gone; and then when you do go to pray, you feel dry, the heavens are frozen over, and the enemy says, "You must wait until meeting again." Or, if you should seek your closet as soon as you get home you are constantly distracted with thoughts of this or that which must be done until your mind is completely diverted, and you are helpless. What shall you do? First, stop yielding to such suggestions. Then seize the first chance as God-given, and force your way through. Stop yielding to circumstances, and make circumstances of your own. Now is God's time; these surroundings were permitted by God, and you can make them all work for your good and to your salvation.

7. The next thing likely to keep you from immediate action is the thought that certain persons are not at hand to pray for you. You have great confidence in the prayers of certain ones, and it may be that your confidence is not misplaced; but you must not lean too much on the arm of flesh. True it is that God generally employs human instrumentalities in the work of salvation, yet he is not confined to any certain one, and can, if he chooses, work independent of any. There have been cases where seekers have set their eyes on certain persons and thought if they could obtain their aid they would be cleansed. There is sometimes a good deal of the spirit of Naaman in this. They want the prophet to pronounce words over them, lay his hand on their head and say the word of salvation. They would be greatly disappointed if he would tell them just to go and wash in the sin-cleansing Jordan, and promise them that if they did they would be made whole. But it may be possible that if you get with the person you so desire to see, that God will not let him help you; and that if he does attempt to do so he will hinder more than help. It is neither Paul nor Apollos nor Cephas, but Christ that does the work.

Still you may say, "All this is true, but I have 'no one that is likeminded' to help me. I am all alone in the community. There are no holiness people, and if I should even mention the longings of my heart, they would think I had lost my mind." Yours is indeed a sad lot, but there is help. Let us quote the words of the saintly Fletcher addressed to such as you: But perhaps thou art alone. As a solitary bird which sitteth on the housetop, thou lookest for a companion who may go with thee through the deepest travail of the regeneration.

But alas! thou lookest in vain: all the professors about thee seem satisfied with their former experiences, and with self-imputed or self-conceited perfection. When thou givest them a hint of thy want of power from on high, and of thy hunger and thirst after a fullness of righteousness, they do not sympathize with thee. And indeed how can they? They are full already; they reign without thee; they have need of nothing. They do not sensibly want that God would grant them according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with might in the inner man, that Christ may dwell in their hearts by faith, that they, being rooted and grounded in love, may comprehend with all saints (perfected in love) what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height, and to know the love of Christ which passeth knowledge, that they might be filled with all the fullness of God (Eph. 3: 16, etc).

They look upon thee as a whimsical person, full of singular notions, and they rather dampen than enliven thy hopes. Thy circumstances are sad; but do not give place to despair, no, not for a moment In the name of Christ, who could not get even Peter, James, and John, to watch with him one hour; and who was

obliged to go through his agony alone; -- in his name, I say, 'Cast not away thy confidence, which has great recompense of reward.' Under all thy discouragements, remember that, after all, divine grace is not confined to numbers, any more than to a few.

When all outward helps fail thee, make the more of Christ, on whom sufficient help is laid for thee -- Christ, who says, 'I will go with thee through fire and water;' the former shall not burn thee, nor the latter drown thee. Jacob was alone when he wrestled with the angel, yet he prevailed; and if the servant is not above his master, wonder not that it should be said of thee, as of thy Lord, when he went through his greatest temptations, 'Of the people there was none with him.'<sup>8</sup>.

Spiritual sloth manifests itself in some people in half-hearted seeking. They keep at it steadily enough but never seem to make any headway. Their efforts are sluggish and lacking in the spirit of real importunity. They can be depended upon to be at every camp-meeting or holiness convention, and to be down at the altar praying the same old prayer for sanctification. Perhaps it is better to do this than not to seek at all, better to be at every altar service than to be altogether indifferent.

Die trying, if necessary; but there is one thing you can depend upon, this easy-going, half-hearted way must be broken up if you ever obtain the experience. Jesus said, "The kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force." Bestir yourself. Get out of this rut. It may be that you are so "settled on your lees" that it will take a mighty effort to do so. But settle it that the work must be done. Do something desperate, if necessary, in order to stir up your sluggish soul. Proclaim a fast, drop everything else that you possibly can, and launch out after God. Victory will come.

9. Still others seek like a colt or a balky horse pulling at a load -- by jerks. To see them lean over, strain every muscle, and jerk at the load you would think something must come. The traces and whiffletrees seem to be in danger, but nothing will be harmed, at least nothing will move. So with some seekers; at times they seem to pray earnestly, and people looking on are greatly encouraged. They throw back their heads, swing their arms like a windmill, sweat and holler till the veins of their necks swell out, fall over on the floor and cry, "Sanctify me, sanctify me" at the top of their voices; but lo, they run against some carnal tendency, and, instead of confessing it out, they either stop seeking or try to thresh through without meeting the light (trying to pound their way around the cross), and, failing in this, they back down and become indifferent and lazy for a season, and, it may be, backslide. After a while they take a fresh start; and so the process is repeated again and again. The way for such persons to do is to force themselves to the cross, not boisterously, but with determination; and calmly and intelligently hold themselves up against the white light of heaven. They may not make so much noise, but the clear light of heaven will purge out every vestige of carnality till they are pure within, like gold tried in the fire. Rev. B. T. Roberts says, "The best way to seek holiness is to seek it." Get at it, and keep at it till the victory comes. "Keeping everlastingly at it brings success."

As soon as you settle the question that you will seek and seek earnestly, you will be harassed by the enemy with all sorts of suggestions. Some of them will be seemingly harmless, some the most vicious possible; some of them will be open, with the acknowledgement that they are from the devil, while others will be underhanded and deceitful. He will step to your side and, if possible, fill your mind with fearful thoughts of distrust and unbelief, and cause you to stagger in your decision. There is little doubt that he hates holiness more than any other thing, and, as a consequence, will level his most destructive machinery at this point. But faith in God will make you invulnerable to all his fiery darts. Let us notice some of his most successful suggestions:

"God will not cleanse the heart." He is now perfectly willing that you should believe in justification, but is very solicitous lest you should deceive yourself and seek holiness. But this one passage should be enough to settle your mind on this point and forever put to rout the father of lies: "And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and I pray God that your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. Faithful is he that calleth you, who also will do it" (1 Thess. 5: 23, 24). Such a prayer, followed by such a "faithful promise" ought to convince the most stubborn heart that knows anything of God's power.

Failing here the enemy will say: "Yes, God can and does cleanse, but will not cleanse you." Anything suits him but to make the matter of salvation personal. The passage quoted above is personal, and is a promise that YOU may be cleansed. Akin to the foregoing suggestion is the thought which is sometimes suggested that none but the apostles ever had or ever can have such an experience. But there is no place in God's word where even intimation is given that such gifts should depart from the church. On the contrary it sparkles with encouraging promises of the graces of holiness to be given to all who believe. Jesus said, "Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word" (Jno. 17: 20); and, strange to say, he was speaking of sanctification, having said just before, "Sanctify them through thy truth." You and I are among the chosen number, for we believe the words of the apostles left for us in the New Testament.

Then the enemy will suggest, "Yea, he will cleanse you, but not until just before you die." God fully appreciated the fact that it would be hard for the unbelieving human heart to grasp the fact that he would actually cleanse it from all carnality in this world, and so to help our faith, not only by promise, but also by his immutable oath, he lifted up his hand and swore by himself (for he could swear by no greater), that we might be holy not only at death, but all the days of our life. Read these wonderful words given from the lips of Zacharias while under the inspiration of the Holy Ghost, and recorded by Luke (Chapter 1: 73 to 75): "The oath which he sware to our father Abraham, that he would grant us, that we being delivered out of the hand of our enemies might serve him without fear, in holiness and righteousness before him, all the days of our life."

Again the enemy says: Your heart is too treacherous, you cannot get it in the attitude before God where it can be cleansed." But your heart is just like the hearts of others: they have conquered by the grace of God, and you can do the same. The following, from Horatius Bonar, is to the point here: Do not keep back from Christ under the idea that you must come to him in a disinterested frame, and from a strictly unselfish motive. If you are right in this thing, who can be saved? You are to come as you are; with all your bad motives, whatever these may be. [That is, involuntary motives are wrong; if not what would be the use in seeking any more grace? but the real motives must be acceptable to God: or you will "ask and receive not."] Take all your bad motives; add them to the number of your sins, and bring them all to the altar where the great sacrifice is lying. Go to the mercy seat. Tell the High Priest there, not what you desire to be, nor what you ought to be, but what you are. Tell him the honest truth as to your condition at this moment. Confess the impurity of your motives; all the evil that you feel, or that you don't feel; your hard-heartedness, your blindness, your unteachableness. Confess everything without reserve. He wants you to come to him exactly as you are, and not cherish the vain thought that, by a little waiting, or working, or praying, you can make yourself fit, or persuade him to make you fit. Then at times the enemy takes the opposite extreme, and says: "You are so indifferent that it is impossible that you should lay hold of God for cleansing." Be it so, your very indifference is an excuse for coming to God, and it is the glory of his divinity to wake you and take away your indifference. Fletcher says to come to God by faith, "bringing nothing with

you but a careless, distracted, tossed, hardened heart, -- just such a heart as you have got now." Confess your indifference and God will help you. Some one has testified thus: "How reasonable that we should just do that one small act which God requires of us, go and tell him the truth. I used to go and say, 'Lord, I am a sinner, do have mercy on me;' but as I did not feel all this, I began to see that I was taking a lie in my hand, trying to persuade the Almighty that I felt things which I did not feel. These prayers and confessions brought me no comfort, no answer, so at last I changed my tone, and began to tell the truth -- 'Lord, I do not feel myself a sinner; I do not feel that I need mercy. Now all was right; the sweetest reception, the most loving encouragements, the most refreshing answers, this confession of the truth brought down from heaven. I did not get anything by declaring myself a sinner, for I felt it not; but I obtained everything by confessing that I did not see myself one."

If he fails in every other attempt the devil may be successful in trying to get you to grow into the experience. But you might as well try to grow weeds out of your garden as to grow the carnal nature out of your heart. But you think grace by being constantly cultivated will so increase that it will kill out sin. Greater grace by its having greater ability to do right may weaken the power of sin, but it takes an especial act of divine grace to kill the sin. If not, it is not done by God but by ourselves. The following from Wesley is to the point:

Four or five and forty years ago, when I had no distinct views of what the apostle meant by exhorting us to leave the principles of the doctrine of Christ, and go on to perfection, two or three persons in London whom I knew to be truly sincere, desired to give me an account of their experience. It seemed exceeding strange, being different from any that I had heard before. \* \* \* The next year, two or three more in Bristol, and two or three in Kingswood, coming to me severally, gave me exactly the same account of their experience. A few years after, I desired all those in London, who made the same profession, to come to me all together at the Foundry, that I might be thoroughly satisfied. I desired that man of God, Thomas Walsh, to give us the meeting there. When we met, first one of us, and then the other, asked the most searching questions we could devise. They answered every one without hesitation, and with the utmost simplicity, so that we were fully persuaded they did not deceive themselves. In the years 1759, 1760, 1761 and 1762, their number multiplied exceedingly, not only in London and Bristol, but in various parts of Ireland as well as England. Not trusting to the testimony of others, I carefully examined the most of these myself; and in London alone, I found six hundred and fifty-two members of our society, who were exceedingly clear in their experience, and of whose testimony I could see no reason to doubt I believe no year has passed since that time wherein God has not wrought the same work in many others; but sometimes in one part of England or Ireland, sometimes in another; -- as 'the wind bloweth where it listeth' -- and every one of these (after the most careful inquiry, I have not found one exception either in Great Britain or Ireland) has declared that his deliverance from sin was instantaneous; that the change was wrought in a moment. Had half of these, or one-third, or one in twenty, declared it was gradually wrought in them, I should have believed this, with regard to them, and thought that some were gradually sanctified and some instantaneously. But as I have not found, in so long a space of time, a single person speaking thus; as all who believe they are sanctified, declare with one voice, that the change was wrought in a moment, I cannot but believe that sanctification is commonly, if not always, an instantaneous work.

To the foregoing quotation let us add one from Fletcher, one of the most remarkable men of early Methodism:

If our hearts be purified by faith, as the scriptures expressly testify; if the faith which peculiarly purifies the hearts of Christians be a faith in the 'promise of the Father,' which promise was made by the Son and

directly points at a peculiar effusion of the Holy Ghost, the purifier of spirits; if we may believe in a moment ; and if God only may, in a moment, seal our sanctifying faith by sending us of his sanctifying Spirit: if this, I say, be the case, does it not follow, that to deny the possibility of the instantaneous destruction of sin, is to deny, contrary to scripture and to fact, that we can make an instantaneous act of faith in the sanctifying promise of the Father, and in the all-cleansing blood of the Son, and that God can seal the act by the instantaneous operation of his Spirit? \* \* \* This is not all. If you deny the possibility of the quick destruction of indwelling sin, you send to hell, or to some unscriptural purgatory, not only the dying thief, but also all those martyrs who suddenly embraced the Christian faith, and were instantly put to death by bloody persecutors for confessing the faith which they had just embraced. And if you allow that God may 'cut his work short in righteousness' and in such case, why not in other cases? Why not, especially when a believer confesses his indwelling sin, ardently prays Christ would, and sincerely believes that Christ can, 'now cleanse him from all unrighteousness?'The accusations and suggestions mentioned above, together with numerous others, may be used by the enemy to hinder you from seeking and obtaining the "promise of the Father," but, as with Bunyan's pilgrim, the only safe way for you to do is to "put your fingers in your ears and run" crying, "Life! life! eternal life!" and never stop till you reach the goal of your endeavors.

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