

# The Besetting Sin (Heb. Xii: 1-4)

by Seth Rees

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*To run the Christian race effectively, we must lay aside every weight, including inbred sin, and look unto Jesus with patience and faith.*

**Scripture:** Matthew 5:29, 1 Corinthians 9:24, Philippians 3:13, Colossians 3:5, 2 Timothy 4:7, Hebrews 6:12, Hebrews 12:1, 1 Peter 1:6

**Topics:** "Christian Living", "Sanctification"

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## Description

Seth Rees preaches on the heavenly race described in Hebrews 12:1-4, emphasizing the need to run with patience, looking unto Jesus as the Author and Finisher of our faith. He highlights the importance of laying aside every weight and the inbred sin that easily besets us to run the Christian race credibly and win the prize. Rees stresses the necessity of being saved, sanctified, and continuously progressing in the race, enduring trials with patience and focusing on Jesus amidst challenges. He urges believers to consider the cloud of witnesses cheering us on and to eliminate anything hindering our spiritual progress to become strong men and women in the race.

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## Transcript

"Wherefore seeing we 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." Heb. 12:1-4.

These first verses of the twelfth chapter of Hebrews gives us a description of the heavenly race which must be run with patience, looking unto Jesus. The world is full of races in these times. During the past year there have been hundreds of competitions, both by sea and by land. Some of them have been credible but, usually, they are most disreputable and demoralizing in their influences. They are entered into with all the zest of which human nature is capable. We have reached a time in the history of the world when many of our seminaries and universities give almost as much time to training heels as heads. These worldly competitions have a strange fascination for almost all classes except the wholly sanctified.

Many of the evils of these days are but perversions of something good. A desire to excel in the best and highest things is quite lawful. God has planted in the human heart for wise purposes a desire to reach the

highest excellence. The Apostle, who is the author of this text, some times speaks in a military style; and when he does he uses the strongest figures possible. For the most forceful illustration of the warfare against sin and Satan, as waged by a true Christian soldier.

But here he is speaking in a gymnastic style, and refers to the Olympic games and races, which were the customs of those times, as a figure of the Christian race and makes the strongest possible effort to apply this illustration to the principles which he has recorded in the previous chapter. The eleventh chapter of Hebrews is often called the pyramid of faith. It is a collection of the most wonderful things that have ever occurred in the history of God's own people. He piles up in this, the eleventh chapter, the strongest characters -- the men who have reached the highest experiences in Divine grace. We find that he begins at the beginning of all things and declares that it was by faith that all these mighty results were brought to pass. And the men who have stood head and shoulders above the rank and file in the realm of the spiritual life reached this eminence and accomplished what they did, and suffered what they endured, through faith. Such men as Abraham and Moses or Enoch, who walked with God three hundred years, are in this list. One after another of the holy prophets are mentioned, together with their startling exploits until he comes down to the days of Jesus and then turns and says, that all the wonderful things thus piled up were wrought through faith. He then regards this long list of heroes as a cloud of witnesses, watching our race. "Seeing we are compassed about by so great a cloud of witnesses let us lay aside every weight, running with patience the race that is set before us."

The Christian race is full of rugged realities. There is a great deal about some people's religion that seems mostly emotion, gush or foam, but I do not see how anybody can walk through the eleventh chapter of Hebrews without being profoundly impressed with the fact that it means walking in a rugged way to go through with God. To face our foes and to enter upon this holy warfare means a perpetual conflict, an engagement with regiments of living foes. Enemies entirely too strong for us confront us at every forward step, but while we have the most powerful enemies to face we have the most glorious possibilities stretched out before us. Here we are called upon to run a race and I notice enough in this text to make me feel that we ought to be bent on this one thing. "This one thing I do." And if so every thing that would hinder must go. Anything that would impede our progress or that would in any wise hinder us from making the best possible time in this heavenly race must be laid aside. It is not enough that we are saved and sanctified. This is wonderful but it is not the ultimatum, it is only the beginning. We are to run the race and run it creditably. To run it to win a prize. It is glorious beyond expression to be saved, to know that our names are written in heaven, to have a clear, keen, sweet consciousness that we are ready to enter into the city; but in this text there is more. A prize is held up, plaudits are to be sounded, scepters to be given, well done's announced, crowns to be bestowed, and the lasting fame of eternity may be ours through all the roll of coming centuries. There is something besides salvation for every man who wants it.

The apostle was saved from all sin but he said, "I must forget something and I must get something, a prize, a crown, something at the end of the race." There is something a man may lose and yet have salvation. There is something a man may miss and yet get into heaven. Paul had forgiveness of sins, he was sanctified wholly, but there was a something at the end of the race which induced him to do his best. There was something he might possess and so he says, "forgetting everything else, leaving everything else behind, I will press through what ever comes but I must have this prize." I want to notice at this stage of my remarks that the racer was trained and prepared with great care by a trainer. Great preparations were made for these races. The runner often carried bags of sand for days before the race came off, that he might feel light footed and do his best. But he never ran with a bag of sand. He always laid everything

aside before he ran the race. There are certain things we are called upon in this passage to lay aside.

want to notice that we are to lay aside the sin that does so easily beset us. That besetting sin is inbred sin. Someone said the other day "my besetting sin is a hasty temper;" another has said, "mine is pride;" another has thought it is "selfishness," and so on, but this is a mistake. The besetting sin is inbred sin, and pride, temper, malice, selfishness, anger, etc., are the outgrowth or the outputtings of it. Inbred sin is responsible for the whole catalogue. It is the nest egg or the original stock of everything that is evil. "The upsetting sin" as the old lady said. The sin that causes a person to do unkind things. The sin that keeps him from self-denial and from being unselfish. Inbred sin is responsible for all the irregularities in the life of one who is a real Christian but is not yet sanctified. There are a great many people who have gone through the motions of getting it out and say they have gotten rid of it, but their life proves their mistake. Inbred sin will not relinquish its hold on the spiritual nature by mere hints or signs or resolutions. Do not think you can shout it out or frighten it away by a few jumps. Carnality fastens its awful fangs on the human soul and grips the very fiber of your being, and buries its talons in the innermost part of your moral nature. It will never let go until the mighty power of God comes upon the soul and bids it depart. Many are mistaken. There are people here this morning who think they have been sanctified who are not. Inbred sin is subtle, it is deceptive, it is persuasive.

Inbred sin is sometimes termed the Old Man, the body of sin. He will agree to put up with all sorts of treatment or discipline that it is possible to subject him to, if he is only allowed to remain in the soul. He will agree to take the smallest and most inconvenient corner if he may only be allowed to stay. He dreads the thought of annihilation. He stoutly protests against cruelty and against being expelled.

The cross is a rugged way and he seeks something easier. But real crucifixion of the body of sin is the only cure for irregularities in Christian life. Thank God, it is possible to get the real thing. The baptism with the Holy Ghost and fire destroys carnality, settles us down and gives us a solidity found no where else.

This is what gives us weight; takes away all that is chaffy, frivolous and nonsensical. We are often deeply pained by a frivolity found among the so-called Holiness people. The entirely sanctified soul takes on solidity and moves with a sort of a spiritual poise and fixedness of purpose that causes him to keep on his way no matter what difficulties and trials he may be called to encounter.

"Lay aside the sin." It is hard work to do it. It means a funeral. It means to be crucified. It means to part with the thing that is nearest and dearest to your heart. The thing that you have coddled and nursed and hugged. God help us this morning to see, that if we are to run this race we must lay aside inbred sin.

I have seen many altar services where people are put through a sham process with shouting and singing, and when they get through the work will have to be done over again. If you get through by the Omnipotent energies of the Holy Ghost you will be free from inbred sin. I am so glad that He sanctified me, and that I laid aside every weight and the sin that did so easily beset me.

It is a great mistake to go forward to the altar to get rid of any particular sin, the thing to do is to get rid of inbred sin. If you can down and conquer yourself you will be able to down and conquer all that come up against you. We must have victory in our own souls before we can expect to conquer in the open field.

Again, I notice that we are not only to lay aside the sin, but there are weights. There are many weights not sinful within themselves but they will impede our progress, and if we find that this is the case, they must be laid aside. The Holy Ghost will teach us how we ought to live and act. But we must never undertake to

harness anybody else up to our practice in things not essential.

There are some things too heavy to carry and run well. A flowing wrapper or a morning robe may do for the chamber or rocking chair, but it would not be convenient to run a race in. There are some things we must lay aside. The Holy Ghost will tell us what they are. If we are going to run this race we must be at our best. Now the thought I want to impress is this, that we are not to stop at being saved and sanctified, shouting over this fact all the time, jumping up and down in a peek measure, but we want to get up and go out and get somewhere. We must make progress. It is a race and we must win. I say to you this morning, that if I can find anything in my heart or life that is hindering me from making the best time possible in this race, I will lay it aside.

It will take at least a two forty gait to make this race creditably. God's thought is to so fill us with the Holy Ghost that we can run this race with ease, with alacrity and speed.

I once read about two Irish chieftains, who both laid claim to a beautiful mountain lake. To settle the question of ownership a challenge was made of a race across the lake, and the one who first touched the opposite shore should be declared the owner. They rowed hard. The race was even until they were more than half across the lake, when one of the boats began to fall behind and the other was fast nearing the shore. Suddenly the one who was behind picked up a hatchet and cutoff his hand, and taking it in the other hand threw it to the shore. With respect to his courage he was declared the owner. This is only a story which I read, but it illustrates my point. We must win the prize if we have to cut off our right hand, or pluck out a right eye. We must touch the shore. We must win the crown. The Bible announces that if your right eye offend you pluck it out, or if your right hand, cut it off. Anything that impedes your progress you must lay aside, no matter what the cost.

Another thing I notice in this race the racer had no time to watch what was going on around him. He must live in constant application to the end in view. The galleries were crowded with people, but he had no time to glance at them. If you are going to make the best time you have got to keep your eyes off of people and surroundings. In a very important sense we have got to leave other people alone if we are going to succeed in this race.

Again, I notice it is a race of patience. When I begin to talk about "running" and "getting somewhere," and "doing something," somebody feels they must jump higher and make more noise, but that is not it. Our race is not a race of manliness so much as it is one of patience. It is not so much what we do as what we can suffer. Often we are making the best time when we are waiting upon God, and perhaps in the eyes of others are making little progress. Surrounded by a great deal of noise and demonstration there often comes a temptation to some to think they must be doing the same way. This race is a race of patience and many a time I have made more progress by standing still to see the salvation of the Lord. There will be times when you will not feel like you are running but you are, and these are the times when you outgrow your clothes. In the midst of the sorest trials, the deepest testings, the most painful conflicts, the most protracted sorrows, the things that seem to have no end, these may be the very things that are giving you spiritual development. I am talking to you right out of my own heart. There is a patient running of this race in which you will be making good time even when folks think you are backslidden. If we are making good time with the Lord it is enough. Oh, if He can look at us and say, "well done;" if He can say, "she hath done what she could." If the Lord can smile upon you in your coffin-box and say, "good and faithful servant," it will be well. It is not so much what we accomplish as where we are. Your race may largely be one of suffering, but if you patiently endure all and suffer without complaint, you will certainly touch the other

shore and win the crown.

Look at the characters piled up in the eleventh chapter of Hebrews. They were sawn asunder, they were hung on hooks, they were crucified, some of them with their heads downward; they were boiled in oil and were better after they were boiled than before. Stripes, imprisonments, scourgings -- Paul, this does not look much like victory, you being let down the wall of the city in a basket to save your life. But Paul cries out, "Thanks be unto God which always causeth us to triumph." As much going down in a basket as up in a balloon. The lower down you go the higher up you are. It is not in how high you can jump, nor how loud you can shout. All there is in demonstration is simply the product of what you have in your soul and when it is regarded as more than this, it is a snare and a hindrance. The emotions you can only have for a time, but I am talking about something you can keep up forever.

I used to be afraid to get old until I had met a few old folks who had the blessing, then I had no more fears. I am going to finish my course, I do not care how I feel. If I would thump myself to see how I feel, many times I would conclude that I had no religion, but I have something better to go by than that. We live by faith. "Faith is the substance of things hoped for;" and I would rather have the substance any time than the shadow. If a man has faith he can run through Monday, and over across Wednesday, and down through Friday and Saturday and have victory every step of the way.

Now, beloved, it is easy for you to shout just here, but do you know I am burdened. Do you know I have groans in my soul. Some of you were raised on farms and you know the difference in the sound of the rattle of a loaded or empty wagon. You know how on a cold wintry day a heavily loaded wagon starts to market, how she jingles. How different the sound is when she comes home empty. Beloved, I am concerned that our people should be loaded wagons and that they should be burdened and carry this burden of souls until the Lord shall say, "you are running this race with patience, looking unto Jesus." There were times in the life of Jesus when "for the joy that was set before Him, He endured the cross, despising the shame." He was buffeted and rejected; He was spit upon and smitten; He wore the purple of derision, but despising the shame He hurried to the cross. He pressed His way through and accomplished the object of His undertaking. Many times they tried to kill Him; but He said, "My Father's work I must do." And He pushed through the forty days and nights in the wilderness; through the darkness of that awful night in the garden. He hurried through the judgment hall and hurried up to the cross. He pressed His way to where He could say, "It is finished." It was the joy that was set before Him that made Him forget everything; and when the multitudes were around Him, and they were weeping, He turned to them and said, "Weep not for me, but weep for yourselves and your children." He was so self denying and forgetful of all His own interests, His thought was all for others despising the shame He forgot everything and suffered everything to save you and me. Beloved, let us go and do likewise.

We want to get through so the witnesses will not be ashamed of us. Now they are in the galleries of Heaven. He says they are witnesses. Talk about wondering whether Brother Knapp knows what is going on in this Bible School. If this text means anything it means that those who have gone before are witnessing our race. What is contained in the eleventh chapter of Hebrews is just like saying, "The galleries of heaven are full of just such men as I have mentioned here; Do your best." This is my translation. Oh, if we could just realize the fact that we are surrounded by those who have run the race and won the prize. A few years ago they were in the very race we are now running. A few years more and we will be where they are. It is only a short time. The race is short. We must succeed. "Looking unto Jesus."

You know these are days of awful testings. These are days when those who walk in the Holy Ghost have trials to bear that they never dreamed of. Hence there must be a continual "looking unto Jesus." We sometimes try to do too much; make too hard work of it. It is just by a look that we get the Blessing, and just by a look that we keep it. Considering Him. Not considering ourselves; not considering our trials; not considering our circumstances. Consider Him and you will be making time in the heavenly race.

I was burdened with a message for you this morning. Not for your sakes alone but for the people to whom you are going to preach. I want you to tell them it is a race and they must be up and at it. The young man, when he went to Jesus laid aside his garment. He felt it might hinder him getting through the press. We must do likewise.

In conclusion I want to testify I am asking God to eliminate from me everything that impedes my progress. Entire sanctification is instantaneous in its reception, but there is so much to leave off, such a vast deal to learn, so much to be developed after we are sanctified, that in this sense it is a gradual work. If God can have His way with us He will bring out the rugged qualities and make us strong men and women to run a good race.

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