

Charles G. Finney:

"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."
--Hebrews 12:1

In discussing this subject I shall,

I. SHOW WHAT RACE IS HERE SPOKEN OF.

II. WHAT IS AT STAKE.

III. THE CONDITIONS OF WINNING IN THIS RACE.

I. What this race is.

In this text the apostle manifestly alludes to the Olympian and Isthmian games which were celebrated in the East, and with which his readers were familiar. As these games were extensively known, he often alludes to them, to illustrate the truths of Christianity. These games originated in the policy of government, to develop the physical powers of their subjects, and give them the greatest possible efficiency. Before gunpowder came into use, success in war depended much more than it now does upon the physical power and dexterity of an army. Armies then met hand to hand with swords, spears and war-clubs, bows and arrows, and crossbows, and all those weapons to wield which required great physical energy and strength. Consequently it entered into the policy of governments to cultivate physical development as much as possible. For this purpose schools were established for training men to run foot-races, to handle the spear, the sword and the shield, and engage in all those exercises which serve to develop the muscular system to the utmost. In order to give great popularity to this system of exercises, these games were established and sustained by the highest civil authorities; even kings attended their celebrations. Great preparations were made for months and even years beforehand, by the most careful training of the competitors. Some of these games were foot races, it being in those times a matter of great importance that men should be able to run with great speed and for a long time. Alongside of the whole race-ground, seats were erected rising one above another, affording accommodations for an immense number of spectators. Indeed the great mass of the population of whole kingdoms was assembled on these occasions. When these seats, forming a vast amphitheater on either side, were all filled with spectators they might be called a "great cloud of witnesses."

The competitors in these games, of course made great preparations for running. Their dress, if indeed they wore any, was so arranged as to give every muscle the fullest play. Every thing was carefully avoided that might in the least prevent the freest and fullest exertion of their entire strength. They laid aside every [e]ncumbrance; exercised themselves daily; observed the utmost temperance in all their habits; in short, neglected nothing that was supposed to be conducive to their utmost speed.

Several things were to be attended to in running the race.

1. They must start right, or according to rule.

2. They must run the race through. If they started right, ran according to rule, and came out ahead of their competitors, they were crowned. Otherwise not.

Now in this passage the apostle manifestly alludes to these races, with which, comparing the Christian life, he calls it a race. The Christian life is also sometimes called a fight or battle. It is a great conflict, waged with the world, the flesh and the devil. The apostle's design is to bring out the truth that in order to be successful in winning the race, we must make the utmost exertion.

It is the Christian race then that is here spoken of, or that struggle with the world, the flesh and the devil, with which every Christian is familiar, and through which he must pass to win the crown.

II. I am to show what is at stake in this race.

The prize is a crown of eternal glory. It includes all that is honorable and glorious in heaven--to share with Christ in his glory;--to sit down with him on his throne; to become kings and priests unto God;--to be God's adopted children and have mansions in his palace; to sit at his table and enjoy all the honors and blessedness of sonship with the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost.

III. The conditions of winning in this race.

The first condition mentioned in the text is, that we lay aside every weight. This race or conflict is mental, not physical; it belongs to the mind and not to the body. We enquire therefore what is to be regarded as a weight or unnecessary incumbrance in running this race; I answer,

[1.]* All unnecessary business. By this I mean any kind or degree of business to which we are not manifestly called by the providence of God. Any business in kind or amount to which we are manifestly called by the providence of God, and to which we attend with a single eye to his glory, is not inconsistent with our running the race, is not to be regarded as a weight, but as a part of our business and duty as Christians, and therefore as part of the race itself. But when a man engages in any business, however great or small, to which he is not thus called, he then takes an unnecessary burden upon himself. It is a dead weight upon him--nay, he cannot run at all with this business upon him because it is selfishness, and he has already apostatized from God and gone over to the serving of himself.

He has no right to do, say, or be any thing more or less than that to which God calls him. If he undertakes any selfish business, or takes any more or less upon him than duty to God requires, he is then out of God's service, and consequently can no more win in this race, than a man could win in the Olympic games if he ran right the other way, instead of running towards the goal. Let it be forever remembered that for a man to undertake any business in kind or amount which according to his best judgment is not for the glory of God and is not designed for his glory, is actual apostasy from God, and is a weight that must be laid aside or the soul cannot be saved.

2. Whatever draws unnecessarily upon our time is a weight that must be laid aside. All our time is God's; all to be consecrated to him. Whatever is suffered to occupy a day, an hour, or even a moment of our time that is not demanded by our duty to God, is a weight that just so far hinders our progress in the Christian race. Suppose a racer in the Olympian games should suffer himself to be hindered by the compliments of the spectators; suppose he should stop to receive and return the salutations of his friends and acquaintance as he passed along; and thus lose time and distance instead of tasking his powers every moment--could he win the race? Now it should be forever understood that whenever a man suffers his time to run to waste, or to be desecrated from the service of God--whenever he suffers his time to be occupied with any other than God's business, he then takes upon himself a weight that must be laid aside, or he will never win the race.

3. All engrossments of every kind to which we are not called by the word, or Spirit, or providence of God, are to be laid entirely aside as weights. We have no business to be engrossed with any thing to which we are not called by God himself, whose servants we are. Our whole time, talents, powers, and all are his. The employment of our thoughts, and all our powers is to be entirely for him.

Whenever therefore we take on our hands or on our minds any engrossments to which God does not call us, we have forsaken the service of God, and are employed by somebody else, or in other words we are engaged in serving ourselves instead of God. But this again renders it just as impossible to win the race, as it would be in the Olympic games if the racer should run in the opposite direction from the goal.

4. Whatever demands our attention, to which we are not called by God himself, is to be given up as a weight.

God demands that we give our whole attention to his business, to glorify him, to obey his commands and promote his interests. We have no right therefore to give any part of our attention to that to which he has not called us. Anything therefore that unnecessarily takes up the attention of our minds, that is, every thing that is not a part of God's business, must be laid aside as weights.

5. Whatever engrosses our affections is a weight, and must be laid aside, or we can never win the crown. God demands that our supreme affections should be placed on himself. Whenever we suffer them to be engrossed by any other object whatever, we have then encumbered ourselves with a weight that must be laid aside.

6. All unnecessary cares and burdens are to be considered as weights which must be laid aside. The real wants

of human beings are exceedingly simple. And in general they have but few cares, unless they unnecessarily take them upon themselves. And we have no right to load ourselves down with a multitude of cares and burdens that don't belong to the service of God. Any cares and burdens to which God calls us, we may lay on him who careth for us. But where we engage in matters to which he does not call us, and when we take burdens which he does not impose on us, it is tempting God to pretend to lay these on him. We must therefore assume no cares, and no burdens that we cannot cast on the Lord. Whenever we voluntarily undertake that which is a matter of perplexity, carefulness, and anxiety to which he does not call us, we are out of God's business.--We have taken burdens that we cannot bear and win the race.

7. All unnec[essary] furniture and equipage are to be laid aside as a burden which we cannot bear. See! that woman has to be engaged from morning till night, to see that the useless articles of furniture and trumpery with which her house is filled, are cleaned and dusted, and in good order. She runs from room to room with her dusting cloth, or calls her hired help from room to room, to see that her chairs and bureaus, her sofas and her side boards, and a hundred other things for show and not for use are kept in due order. A great house, much furniture, a small family and little company, and a multitude of things never really needed and seldom used. O! what a burden that woman has taken upon herself, and certainly God has not called her to it. Now can she have all this unnecessary care on her mind and get to heaven? I trow not. And see that man; how he struggles to get along in his Christian race with that mass of useless equipage on his back! Surely God is not so cruel as to task him to run with such a load.

8. The care of all unnecessary property is to be laid aside as a weight.

By unnecessary property I mean that which is not and cannot be managed for the glory of God and the good of souls. I have often thought of a remark of the celebrated Mr. Law. In discoursing upon the folly and wickedness of endeavoring to be rich, he says that a man who labors to lay up one hundred thousand pounds sterling is just as unreasonably employed as if he were endeavoring to lay up one hundred thousand pairs of boots and spurs. It would require all his time to keep them from molding, rusting, and spoiling. He would never wear but few of them and they would occupy his whole time in preserving them. Just so with one hundred thousand pounds; a man can never use it, and it is a great deal of trouble to take care of it. He must occupy nearly his whole time in his counting room and with his books, notes, bonds, and mortgages, and musty papers, and what profit can his one hundred thousand pounds be to him? Why, it is only a burden which if he attempts to carry, will ruin his soul. All property therefore which is above a bare competency, and over and above what is sacredly consecrated to the service and glory of God, held and used for him, is a weight that must be laid aside, or it is impossible to win the crown.

9. All unnecessary articles of dress are to be regarded as weights. Where a man or woman has a large wardrobe to over-haul, and see to, much wearing apparel to be cleansed and aired, and altered, and attended to, it engrosses the thoughts, takes up the time, is an object of care, and a weight that must be laid aside.

10. Fashion is another weight that must be laid aside. What a multitude are busy a great part of their time, as the different seasons follow each other in rapid succession and as the ever fluctuating fashions are introduced, in altering their dresses, making changes, getting new ones and disposing of old ones, running here and there shopping, conversing about the newest fashions, the most tasteful colors, the best milliners, and mantua-makers and tailors, and all the world of gossip and folly which engages the world of fashionables. Who can run the Christian race with a mind filled with such things as these? Who does not perceive at once that persons thus engaged are not consecrated to God? God has never called them to this service and these engrossments. This is selfishness and must ruin the soul. And it is impossible ever to win a crown of glory by living such a life as this.

11. Unnecessary attendance upon company is often a great weight. It is often a great tax on a person's time to receive such a multitude of calls and complimentary visits, and have so many protracted conversations inflicted upon us as is often the case. Christians should always make their arrangements, so as to dispense as far as possible with all unnecessary company. They should be ever ready to exercise hospitality to the utmost of their ability, should receive their friends and be cordial in entertaining strangers, but withal should discountenance all unnecessary drafts on their time in any way whatever. It should be remembered that all waiting on company, receiving and entertaining company, or making visits for company's sake, to which we are not manifestly called by the providence and will of God, is a weight that must be laid aside.

12. All unnecessary reading is also to be laid aside. By unnecessary reading I mean all reading that is not necessary to our highest usefulness and well-being. Every thing that is over and above this we are not called to, by the will of God. It absorbs our attention, is a waste of time, and often much worse than a waste, as it

encumbers our minds with a multitude of things that are inconsistent with our highest holiness and usefulness.

13. All unnecessary conversation is to be regarded as a weight. It is surely a great burden to be obliged to keep our tongues from running. Many persons seem to talk for talk's sake, and to gratify a loquacious spirit. And they will often intrude upon you with some protracted conversation about nothing or that which is as good as nothing, greatly to the hindrance of your spiritual life. Now it should be remembered that our tongues are to be used only to the glory of God, and to the use of edifying, that for every idle word we must give an account in the day of judgment.

All unnecessary conversation should therefore be avoided as entirely inconsistent with growth in grace, and with running our spiritual race. "If any man among you seem to be religious, and bridleth not his tongue, but deceiveth his own heart, this man's religion is vain."

14. Every thing in short to which we are not providentially called and which is not therefore a part of our duty as Christians, would be regarded as a weight and be laid aside. Whatever is inconsistent with or not conducive to our highest usefulness should be regarded as a weight, and at once laid aside.

15. There is another thing to which I must call attention that may be regarded as rather of a delicate nature, I mean all untimely and unsuitable love affairs. Few things more completely engross the mind than love affairs among young people. Now, whenever circumstances are such that the providence of God makes it a duty to seek a wife, or to become a wife, these things are lawful, may be committed to God and attended to without distraction. But whenever the affections are engrossed with such affairs, where there is no call in providence to such a course, it is a grievous weight that must be laid aside. Oh! how much time is spent in brooding over such matters, in reading letters, and in all the multitude of engrossments of thought and feeling, and all the powers of the mind. These things must be laid aside, they don't belong to the service of God, because in the case supposed, there is no providential call for the mind's being given up to such matters; indeed where the mind is thus given up without consulting God and without being called in the course of divine providence to turn the attention in this direction, it is a real abandonment of the service of God, and making provision for the flesh. It is a real heart apostasy. It is an endeavor to please ourselves and not God. To win the crown in this way is impossible. Indeed the object is not to win a crown of glory, but to win a lady; to win a wife or a husband, and that too, not for the glory of God, but to make provision for the flesh to fulfill the lusts thereof.

[2.] A second condition on which we can win in this race is that we lay aside all our besetting sins. A besetting sin is one to which on account of our constitution, or circumstance or both, we are peculiarly exposed, and into which we most easily and most frequently fall. Among these are;

(1.) Ill temper. This is one of the most easily besetting sins of most people. On account of their constitution or health or circumstance it is remarkable to see how many persons frequently become angry. This is a sin which so easily besets many persons, that they seem to be thrown out of balance, and to get angry, and often times to be filled with wrath on the slightest occasions. This must be laid aside.

(2.) Fretfulness is another easily besetting sin. This is anger but in a milder form. It is a peevish, passionate state of mind. Many persons who will seldom be filled with wrath or manifest what is generally called anger, are, nevertheless, extremely given to fretting. This must be laid aside.

(3.) Covetousness is another easily besetting sin. This is selfishness in a peculiar form. Some persons seem to lust after or to covet every thing they see, especially every thing that is a little superior to what they have themselves. A horse, a carriage, a farm, a house, a dress, or anything which exceeds their own things, they covet; little realizing that this is an easily besetting sin. Now all these desires indulged, are entirely inconsistent with running the Christian race. And whoever will notice the operations of his own mind, will find they always destroy his peace of mind, and communion with God. And whenever men indulge the wish of having this, or that, or the other thing, to the possession of which God does not call them, they are always out of the way, and should thrust such temptations entirely aside, or they can never run the Christian race.

Some persons seem never to be satisfied with what they have, but are always lusting after more and better things, just as long as any of their acquaintances have them. As the scripture says, "They enlarge their desire as hell." Now God often gives them their desire, but sends leanness into their souls. Have you never observed this, that when you have set your heart very much on having something which you did not possess, when you get it, it is a snare to your soul, engrosses your thoughts and time, and leads you away from God?

(4.) Another easily besetting sin is avarice. Avarice is a disposition to hoard up property. Some persons are so

much disposed to this sin, that an opportunity to make a good bargain, a speculation, is a great temptation to them. There is a constant tendency in their minds to selfishness in this form. But this must be restrained and put away, or we shall never get to heaven.

(5.) Dishonesty is another easily besetting sin. Some persons find it extremely difficult to be upright and honest in what they say and do. They are tempted to little, petty frauds and over-reachings in almost every thing, and frequently fall before these temptations. They are not sincere and honest with themselves in their religious matters, nor upright with God. In short, they strongly tend to a hypocritical state of mind. We cannot run a Christian race successfully without putting this entirely away.

(6.) Falsehood is another easily besetting sin of many people. They do not seem to possess a truthful spirit. They do not appear to love truth for its own sake, but are very prone to give a false coloring to almost every thing they say. The lights and shades are thrown in at their own discretion, in such a way as to make a false impression. Now this sin so easily besets some people, that I never know exactly what to believe from what they say.

(7.) Trespassing on other's rights, is another easily besetting sin. It is astonishing to see what a tendency there is in some minds to trespass on other's grounds, by crossing their field perhaps with a team without permission, leaving down their fences, and committing trespasses on their rights in a great variety of ways, apparently without the least compunction of conscience. They go into their neighbor's land and get timber for wood and other purposes without leave, which is really stealing. Indeed it is surprising to see to what an extent many persons will go in disregarding the rights of those about them. They seem to be supremely selfish, and almost supremely reckless, and to go just as far as they think they can without its destroying their character, or reacting on them in a lawsuit. A person of this spirit can no more get to heaven than Satan can, unless he lay aside this state of mind, and cherish a most sacred regard for his neighbor's rights.

(8.) Unfaithfulness in business is another easily besetting sin of many persons. They are not faithful to God in their own business, and never pay that sacred regard to it which their duty to God requires. They do not seem to understand that they are the clerks and agents of the Lord Jesus Christ, and that he expects in them the most entire promptness and faithfulness. They are exceedingly loose, and reckless, and inattentive to business. If they are employed by others as clerks, agents, or laborers, either within doors or without, they are eye-servants, feeling little or no responsibility, attending to nothing only for the sake of wages. They are thus exceedingly unfaithful to their employers and to God, and never can get to heaven with such a state of mind as this. It is sheer selfishness and injustice, and anything but religion.

(9.) Slothfulness is another easily besetting sin of many persons. Multitudes are really too lazy to be religious. Every where in the bible the Christian life is represented as a race, a conflict, that to which the utmost attention must be given, and about which all the faculties of the mind are to be strenuously employed. It is represented as a life of the utmost activity; as much so as the foot races and conflicts in the games to which the text alludes. Now can a slothful person get to heaven? No. All the winds, and waves, and tides of this world's influence set right towards hell, and nothing but girding up our loins and addressing our whole being to the work, will ever enable us to stem the tides, overcome the obstacles, win the prize, and plant our feet on the hills of glory.

(10.) Tale bearing is another besetting sin of many persons. God has said, "Thou shalt not go up and down as a tale-bearer among the children of my people." There are some persons that seem to be so big with every secret which they may chance to know, that they are in agony till they can run about and tell it. They are in the habit of running up and down to tell the news. They are literally tale-bearers. They carry not the newspapers, but the unwritten gossip of the village and the neighbors. Such a person is a pest to society and a sinner, and must lay aside this easily besetting sin if he would ever get to heaven.

(11.) Evil speaking is another easily besetting sin. By evil speaking I mean, speaking of the real or supposed faults of others behind their backs; speaking that which is to their discredit, without being plainly called to it by providence. This is really slander in the spirit of it, whether the things spoken are true or false. It is totally inconsistent with the law of love, in doing by others as we would they should do to us. Consequently it is a sin, and with many an easily besetting sin. It must be laid aside or the race can never be won.

(12.) Levity is another easily besetting sin. Some persons, and indeed many persons are so much given to jesting, tittering, laughing, and idle gossip as not only to dissipate all the solemnity of their own minds, but to be sore temptations to all around them. Levity of mind is exceedingly inconsistent with the Christian religion. Triflers do not get to heaven. Let that be always remembered, and if you are given to this folly, lay it aside or

you will lose your soul.

(13.) Envy is another easily besetting sin of many persons. When they see others rising above themselves in wealth, influence, intellectual or moral improvement; when they see others more beautiful, more humble, or more esteemed than themselves, they lust to envy. This shows a state of mind entirely inconsistent with the love of God and our neighbor. It must be entirely laid aside, denounced, and repented of as sin, or it can never be forgiven.

(14.) Jealousy is an easily besetting sin of many persons. By this I mean a suspicious temper. Some persons are exceedingly given to it. They seem to be constantly on the watch to see if they are not in some way slighted, if some other persons are not preferred to them, if something is not kept a secret from them which others are led to know. This state of mind manifests itself in a thousand ways, and is always a hateful temper, and must be laid aside as a besetting sin.

(15.) Ambition is an easily besetting sin of many persons. This sin takes on a great many forms. It often manifests itself among students, in a desire to rise above others in their class in the esteem of their teachers, in intellectual developments. It is a hydra-headed sin, and seems to be common to a great many persons, from the emperor on his throne, down to the slave who labors in his chains. You will see it in the common school, the college, the theological seminary, the pulpit, at the bar, on the bench, behind the counter, on a military field, everywhere where human beings are. This must be put away.

(16.) Intemperance in eating, is an easily besetting sin of great multitudes of persons. When a person eats more in quantity, or that in quality which is inconsistent with the laws of life and health he is guilty of intemperance. Intemperate eating is as really a sin, as intemperate drinking, and as really inconsistent with salvation.

(17.) Intemperate drinking. There is such a thing as drinking water intemperately, at times and in quantities which are exceedingly injurious to health. All use of stimulating drinks which is inconsistent with the most healthful operations of all the functions of life, is intemperance. God commands us to be temperate in all things. But it has come to pass in these days, that nothing is regarded as intemperance, but some of the most flagrant forms of it; such as the use of intoxicating drinks. Whereas the fact is, that probably ten times more intemperance exists in other things, than in the use of intoxicating drinks. Let it be remembered that every violation of the laws of life and health, to which we are not called by the providence of God, is intemperance. A man may be so circumstanced as to be under the necessity of both eating and drinking things that are not naturally wholesome, of exercising or resting under circumstances that will violate the laws of life and health. But when providence calls to this, it is not sin, and therefore is not the sin of intemperance.

(18.) Pride in vanity and dress, is another easily besetting sin. Persons are always guilty of this, when they put on that which they would not indulge in, were they expecting to receive a personal visit from the Lord Jesus Christ.

(19.) All fleshly indulgences are sins, and with most persons easily besetting sins. We are required to make no provision for the flesh to fulfill the lusts thereof. Whether we eat or drink, or whatsoever we do, we are to do all to the glory of God, and not for the sake of gratifying our appetites and passions. Self-indulgence is always selfishness and always sin. The spirit of self seeking, and self-indulgence must be put away, and whatever we do must be done from a higher motive than to please and gratify ourselves.

20. Unbelief is another easily besetting sin; none more common, and none more fatal than this. How infinitely strange it is, that this should be an easily besetting sin. It shows the great degradation of fallen human nature. That we should so basely distrust infinite truth, and disbelieve him whom we acknowledge cannot lie. This is the grossest of all absurdities, and the most unreasonable of all abominations in the world, and yet seems to be the most easily besetting sin of all mankind. But it must be put away, or damnation is certain.

21. Every neglect of duty must be put away, or we cannot be saved. Some persons are ready to acknowledge that such and such things are their duty, but they will make the acknowledgment with entire indifference, while they neglect the duty. Now this course is as fatal as death itself. How can they be saved who acknowledge their obligations, and yet refuse to discharge them? who make their religion consist rather in confessing that they do not do their duty, than in discharging it? This will not do. Christ will not be satisfied with our confessing what we ought to do, and that we do not do it. Shall we recklessly turn away from what we ought, and do that which we ought not to do? It is true that confession is a duty; but whoso confesseth and forsaketh, shall have mercy.

[3.] The third condition on which the race may be won is that we start right.

The first thing is to be born again. Unless persons are truly regenerated by the Spirit of God, they run in vain. For in fact, they are not in the way. They are running in a wrong direction altogether, and of course will run in vain.

[4.] The fourth condition is that you run lawfully.--You must keep the commandments of Christ. You must live a life of faith on the Son of God. You must learn to walk by faith and not by sight. Christ everywhere makes obedience to his commandments the only evidence of acceptance with him. The Apostle says, and in other places it is asserted, that they that run in a race are not crowned except they run lawfully, that is, according to the rules of the races. Nor shall we win the prize unless we comply with Christ's directions. He is the judge. So run therefore that you may obtain.

[5.] The fifth condition of winning the prize is perseverance to the end. The Bible every where conditionates salvation on perseverance in holiness to the end of life. So does the text--"And run with patience, that is, perseverance, the race that is set before us." Let this be ever remembered.

[6.] The sixth condition is deep earnestness and honesty in religion. No man will, according to Christ's direction, seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, make this the first and the great business of his life, unless he is deeply honest and in earnest on the subject.

[7.] The seventh condition is entire consecration of our lives to the service and glory of God. Nothing short of entire consecration is real honesty and hearty sincerity in the work.

REMARKS.

1. It is fatal to encumber ourselves with any thing that is inconsistent with a holy, spiritual life. Any thing that is inconsistent with our daily walking with God, is entirely inconsistent with our obtaining salvation.

2. From this subject we can see the madness and folly of great multitudes of professors of religion. What would be thought of a racer in the Olympic games who should load himself down with sand, or clay, or iron, or copper, or silver or gold, or should impede the action of his muscles by tight dressing and lacing? Or suffering his time or thoughts to be engrossed with things entirely inconsistent with his making the utmost exertion. Now it appears to me that a great many professors of religion misapprehend the true nature of religion, and what is indispensable to their ever obtaining a crown of glory. Here is one man running the Christian race with an enormous load of unnecessary business on his back; and here is a woman attempting to run the Christian race laced up in such a manner as to be entirely unable to make any exertion. Should she attempt to make any extraordinary exertions, she would fail for want of breath. She has loaded herself down with trinkets and every thing that is inconvenient for the race set before her. There is a man with his enormous pockets full of silver and gold, with an immense bundle of papers under his arm, a tin chest of bonds and mortgages, certificates of bank stock, and multitudes of things strapped on his back. There is another trying to run the Christian race, and driving a whole company of negro slaves before him. He is determined to get to glory, and not to leave his slave property behind. There is another with a monstrous brewing establishment, and another with a whiskey distillery on his shoulders. And in short, we see the racers coming on to the ground, with every variety of fantastic encumbrance on them--with all the weights and besetting sins that the devil could desire them to have, in order to prevent their winning the prize. Now let me say that the conduct of such professors of religion is not only most unreasonable, but so highly ridiculous as to be a mere burlesque on the Christian religion. It is the greatest libel and stumbling block that can be conceived.

3. Until you are prepared to make every needed sacrifice, to cut off a right hand and pluck out a right eye if it causes you to offend, you are never likely to win in this race.

4. You see the importance of counting the cost. It will cost you much to be truly religious. You can obtain a hope. You can pass for a Christian. You can gain a reputation with a worldly church, of being a disciple of Christ. But mark well what I say and what Christ says, except a man forsake all that he hath, he cannot be a disciple of Christ's. Selfishness under every form and in every degree must be cut up root and branch and put away entirely and forever, or you will make shipwreck of your soul.

5. From this subject we see the misery of creating such a multitude of artificial wants among mankind, and the necessity of simplifying as much as possible all our business and all our domestic arrangements, so as to leave the mind as unembarrassed as possible, and to give ourselves as much time as we need to cultivate that deep spirituality which is indispensable to salvation.

Weights and Besetting Sins

6. We see the folly of undertaking responsibilities to which we are not plainly called by our Heavenly Father. These are not things with which we should encumber ourselves, let them be what they may. We should never suffer ourselves to be brought into circumstances of responsibility, to which we are not plainly called in providence. If we do, these will assuredly be stumbling blocks to us. We cannot pray for the blessing, and direction and support of God; and without his direction and support we shall fall, and make shipwreck of our souls.

7. The doctrine of this discourse is not to be admitted merely as a matter of theory, and we cannot get to heaven by merely saying this is true, and we ought to do so and so, and then go as we have done. But let it be understood, we must really and in fact lay aside every weight, and the sin that doth so easily beset us, and run with patience--or, as it should have been rendered, perseverance, the race that is set before us. To acknowledge the obligation and not to comply with it, is fatal. Let this always be understood; when we acknowledge our duty, we must do it, or we have no right to expect the crown. Beloved, let us see to this.