



**Talmid תלמיד** a Hebrew word that means “a true disciple who desires to be what the Rabbi Jesus is.”

*Whoever claims to live in Him must walk as Jesus did. 1 John 2:6 (NIV)*

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STUDY TO SHEW THYSELF APPROVED UNTO GOD, A WORKMAN THAT NEEDETH NOT TO BE ASHAMED, RIGHTLY  
DIVIDING THE WORD OF TRUTH. 2 TIMOTHY 2:15



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## SIN AND CONDEMNATION: THE WORLD'S NEED TO GET RIGHT WITH GOD

### The Arguments of the Religionist (Jew) Against a Heart Religion, [Romans 3:1-8 \(Part 2\)](#)

[Romans 3:1-8 \(NASB\)](#)

<sup>1</sup>Then what advantage has the Jew? Or what is the benefit of circumcision?

<sup>2</sup>Great in every respect. First of all, that they were entrusted with the oracles of God.

<sup>3</sup>What then? If some did not believe, their unbelief will not nullify the faithfulness of God, will it?

<sup>4</sup>May it never be! Rather, let God be found

true, though every man *be found* a liar, as it is written, “**THAT YOU MAY BE JUSTIFIED IN YOUR WORDS, AND PREVAIL WHEN YOU ARE JUDGED.**”

<sup>5</sup>But if our unrighteousness demonstrates the righteousness of God, what shall we say? The God who inflicts wrath is not unrighteous, is He? (I am speaking in human terms.)

<sup>6</sup>May it never be! For otherwise, how will God judge the world?

<sup>7</sup>But if through my lie the truth of God abounded to His glory, why am I also still being judged as a sinner?

<sup>8</sup>And why not say (as we are slanderously reported and as some claim that we say), “Let us do evil that good may come”? Their condemnation is just.

**[2. \(Romans 3:3-4\) Unbelief—Religionist—Salvation:](#)** the question is, “If you say some Jews do not believe and are condemned, doesn’t that void God’s promises and make God a liar?”

The Objection That Paul Attacked God’s Promises

[Romans 3:3-4 \(NASB\)](#)

<sup>3</sup>“What then? If some did not believe, their unbelief will not nullify the faithfulness of God, will it?

<sup>4</sup>May it never be! Rather, let God be found true, though every man *be found* a liar, as it is written, “**THAT YOU MAY BE JUSTIFIED IN YOUR WORDS, AND PREVAIL WHEN YOU ARE JUDGED.**”

The next objection Paul anticipated and confronted was that his teaching abrogated God’s promises to Israel. As any student of the Old Testament knows,

God's promises to His chosen people are numerous. How then, could Paul maintain that it was possible for a Jew not to be secure in those promises?

Or to say it another way, "What if some disbelieve and reject God's Word, will their unbelief cause God to void His Word and promises? God promised the Jews a special place and special privileges through Abraham and his seed (**see previously discussed [Deeper Study #1—John 4:22](#)**). If some Jews do not believe God's promises and God condemns them, isn't He breaking His promise to Abraham and his seed? Isn't He voiding His Word and Covenant and making Himself a liar? God's Word could not be based on heart religion and on moral character alone. There has to be something else, something outward—a rite (circumcision, baptism, church membership)—that shows we are religious (Jews). If we go through the rite or ritual, then God is bound to accept us. He has promised to so accept us. He is not going to break His Word."

The application of this question concerns every religionist. The thinking religionist poses the same objection and question: "If you say some religionists do not believe and are condemned, doesn't that void God's Word and make God a liar? God's Word promises the religious person special privileges and the hope of eternal life. His Word tells us to believe Christ and to possess His Word, be baptized and join the fellowship of the church. If we do that and God still condemns us, is He not voiding His Word and becoming a liar?"

- ⇒ God forbid (*mē genoito*). [**Expresses absolute denial**].
- ⇒ God will be faithful. His Word and promise of salvation will stand even if every man lies about believing and lies about giving his heart to serve Jesus.
- ⇒ God will prove His Word: He will be justified and proven faithful in what He has said. He will still save *any person* who gives his heart to Jesus and obeys Jesus.
- ⇒ In fact, God will overcome; He will prove His Word another way. He will judge all who make a false profession and who judge Him and His Word, who accuse Him of being unfaithful and voiding His Word. David himself said that God would judge the

unfaithful or disobedient man (**[Psalm 51:4](#)**).

**Psalm 51:4 (NASB)**

<sup>4</sup>"Against You, You only, I have sinned And done what is evil in Your sight, So that You are justified when You speak And blameless when You judge."

David had sinned greatly, not keeping the commandments of God, so God judged David and charged him with sin. David did the right thing: he confessed his sin and repented and began to live righteously. But David did something else: he declared that God's **charge and judgment against him were just**, that God was perfectly justified. And God was, for God is always just, and He is always justified in what He says and does.

**The point is twofold.**

1. God is not unfaithful. God never breaks or voids His Word when He rejects the religionist. The religionist who possesses God's Word and belongs to a church but does not obey God's Word is not acceptable to God. It is righteousness God is after, not religion. God is not after an outward religion, but an *inward righteousness*. God wants a heart that will not only possess the Bible, but will keep His commandments.

God is after a spiritual rebirth, a new creation, a man who has been truly born again. God wants a heart and life that are focused upon Christ and that keep the commandments of Christ.

The only man who is acceptable to God is the man who has given his heart and life to Christ and who lives righteously, trusting God to accept His faith in Christ. (Cp. **[Romans 2:28-29](#)**.)

**Romans 2:28-29 (NASB)**

<sup>28</sup>"For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly, nor is circumcision that which is outward in the flesh. <sup>29</sup>But he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that which is of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter; and his praise is not from men, but from God."

Paul's answer reflected both the explicit and implicit teaching of the Jewish Scriptures themselves. God had never promised that any individual Jew, no matter how pure his physical lineage from Abraham, or from any of

the other great saints of the Old Testament, could claim security in God's promises apart from repentance and personal faith in God, resulting in obedience from the heart.

**Isaiah 55:6-7** provides a good illustration of an invitation to such obedient faith: **"Seek the Lord while He may be found; call upon Him while He is near. Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; and let him return to the Lord, and He will have compassion on him; and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon."**

As in the passage from **Amos 3:2** mentioned above, many of God's greatest promises were accompanied by the severest warnings.

**Amos 3:2 (NASB)**

<sup>2</sup>"You only have I chosen among all the families of the earth; Therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities."

And most of the promises were conditional, based on His people's faith and obedience. The few unconditional promises He made were to the nation of Israel as a whole, not to individual Jews (see, e.g., **Genesis 12:3; Isaiah 44:1-5; Zechariah 12:10**).

**Genesis 12:3 (NASB)**

<sup>3</sup>"And I will bless those who bless you, And the one who curses you I will curse. And in you all the families of the earth will be blessed."

**Isaiah 44:1-5 (NASB)**

<sup>1</sup>"But now listen, O Jacob, My servant, And Israel, whom I have chosen:

<sup>2</sup>Thus says the LORD who made you And formed you from the womb, who will help you, 'Do not fear, O Jacob My servant; And you Jeshurun whom I have chosen.

<sup>3</sup>'For I will pour out water on the thirsty land And streams on the dry ground; I will pour out My Spirit on your offspring And My blessing on your descendants;

<sup>4</sup>And they will spring up among the grass Like poplars by streams of water.'

<sup>5</sup>This one will say, 'I am the LORD'S'; And that one will call on the name of Jacob; And another will write on his hand, 'Belonging to the LORD,' And will name Israel's name with honor."

**Zechariah 12:10 (NASB)**

<sup>10</sup>"I will pour out on the house of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the Spirit of grace and of supplication, so that they will look on Me whom they

have pierced; and they will mourn for Him, as one mourns for an only son, and they will weep bitterly over Him like the bitter weeping over a firstborn."

The apostle therefore agreed in part with his accusers, saying, **What then? If some did not believe, their unbelief will not nullify the faithfulness of God, will it?** His opponents were perfectly right in defending the Lord's integrity. No matter how men respond to His promises, He is absolutely faithful to keep His word.

Later in the epistle Paul strongly affirms that God has not rejected His people Israel (**Romans 11:1**).

**Romans 11:1 (NASB)**

<sup>1</sup>"I say then, God has not rejected His people, has He? May it never be! For I too am an Israelite, a descendant of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin."

A few verses later he declares,

**Romans 11:25-29 (NASB)**

<sup>25</sup>"For I do not want you, brethren, to be uninformed of this mystery—so that you will not be wise in your own estimation—that a partial hardening has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in; <sup>26</sup>and so all Israel will be saved; just as it is written, "THE DELIVERER WILL COME FROM ZION, HE WILL REMOVE UNGODLINESS FROM JACOB."

<sup>27</sup>"THIS IS MY COVENANT WITH THEM, WHEN I TAKE AWAY THEIR SINS."

<sup>28</sup>From the standpoint of the gospel they are enemies for your sake, but from the standpoint of God's choice they are beloved for the sake of the fathers;

<sup>29</sup>for the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable."

The national salvation of Israel is as inevitable as God's promises are irrevocable. But that future certainty gives *individual* Jews no more present guarantee of being saved than the most pagan Gentile.

2. God never voids His Word or promises; He never has and never will be a liar. God has promised salvation and eternal life to men. Even if there should never be a single person who believed God's promise, His promise would still stand. He would still save any person who did what He said.

The problem is in doing what God says, in coming to God as He dictates. God demands that men give their hearts and lives to His Son, Jesus Christ. God demands that men live for Christ, worship and obey Him. But this is too hard for men. They want an *easier* salvation. They want to be able to do something, get it over with, and then be free to live as they wish, giving God some atten-

tion here and there. Therefore, men prefer to be saved by being religious: being baptized, joining a church, buying a Bible, and then being free to go about their own lives.

But this is *not enough* for God; it is *not doing everything* that God says; it is not giving one's heart and life to live for Jesus Christ by obeying, worshipping, and serving Him.

Therefore, God...

- ⇒ charges the religionist with sin.
- ⇒ judges and condemns the religionist.

Now note another fact. God fulfills His Word by judging the religionists. God has told men how to live and what would happen if they failed. Therefore, He is **“justified in His sayings”** by following through and by judging the religionists.

- ⇒ God will not void and break His Word. He will fulfill it all.
- ⇒ God is justified in fulfilling His Word by doing exactly what He said, that is, in accepting men *only* as He said and in judging men if they do not come to Him as He commands.

Though certainly not intentionally, the idea in covenant theology that the church has replaced Israel in God's plan of redemption assumes God's faithlessness in keeping His unconditional promises to Israel. Because of Israel's rejection of Jesus Christ as her Messiah, God has postponed the fulfillment of His promise to redeem and restore Israel as a nation. But He has not (and because of His holy nature *He could not*) reneged on that promise.

His prediction, for example, that He will one day **“pour out on the house of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the Spirit of grace and of supplication, so that they will look on Me whom they have pierced”** ([Zechariah 12:10](#)) could not possibly apply to the church.

**Zechariah 12:10 (NASB)**

<sup>10</sup> **“I will pour out on the house of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the Spirit of grace and of supplication, so that they will look on Me whom they have pierced; and they will mourn for Him, as one mourns for an only son, and they will weep bitterly over Him like the bitter weeping over a firstborn.”**

And because such a renewal has never happened in the history of Israel, either the prediction is false or it is yet to be fulfilled.

The mistake of Paul's accusers was in believing that God's unconditional promises to Israel applied to all individual Jews at all times. But as Paul shows earlier in [Zechariah 9:6-7](#), when he writes: **“But it is not as though the word of God has failed. For they are not all Israel who are descended from Israel; neither are they all children because they are Abraham's descendants, but: ‘through Isaac your descendants will be named.’”**

The accusers were right in contending that God cannot break His word. If the blessings of a promise failed to materialize it was because His *people did not believe* and obey the conditions of the promise. But their unbelief could not prevent the salvation which God would ultimately bring to the promised nation.

But an even deeper truth was that, contrary to the thinking of most Jews, salvation was *never* offered by God on the basis of the heritage, ceremony, good works, or any basis other than that of faith. Paul therefore asks rhetorically, **“The fact that Jews who did not believe forfeited their personal right to God's promised blessings and barred themselves from the inheritance of God's kingdom will not nullify the faithfulness of God, will it?”** His salvation will come to Israel some day when all Israel will be saved.

Answering his own question, he exclaims, **May it never be!** The phrase *me genoito* (**may it never be**) was the strongest negative Greek expression and usually carried the connotation of impossibility. "Of course God cannot be unfaithful in His promises or in any other way," Paul was saying.

**Rather, let God be found true, though every man be found a liar.** If every human being who ever lived declared that God is faithless, **God would be found true and every man who testified against Him would be found a liar.**

Summoning Scripture as he regularly did, Paul quotes from the great penitential psalm of David, Israel's most illustrious and beloved king, from whose throne the Messiah Himself would someday reign. **As it is written, “So that You are justified when You**

speaking And blameless when You judge.” (see [Psalm 51:4](#)). Because God is perfect and is Himself the measure of goodness and truth, His Word is its own verification and His judgment its own justification. It is utter folly to suppose that the Lord of heaven and earth might not prevail against the sinful, perverted judgment that either man or Satan could make against Him.

### [DEEPER STUDY #2 \(Romans 3:3\) Unbelief—Man, Errors](#)

### [DEEPER STUDY #3 \(Romans 3:4\) Judging—Judgment](#)

### [DEEPER STUDY # 2](#)

#### [Romans 3:3 \(NASB\)](#)

<sup>3</sup> “What then? If some did not believe, their unbelief will not nullify the faithfulness of God, will it?”

[\(Romans 3:3\) Unbelief—Man, Errors](#): this is one of two common but gross deceptions of men—that unbelief makes a thing ineffective and voids it. A man argues: “If I deny something, ignore it, refuse to accept it, push it out of my mind, it will not be, nor will it come to pass.” Some even think of God’s Word in this way. They think they can deny and reject some part of it and it will not be so. They accept the Scriptures that stress the love of God and allow them to live as they wish, but they reject the Scriptures that stress the supernatural and miraculous power of God and the desperate need of man to be saved from sin, death, and an eternal hell. They reject the Scriptures that demand that man live responsibly.

#### [Matthew 5:18 \(NASB\)](#)

<sup>18</sup> “For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass from the Law until all is accomplished.”

#### [Luke 21:33 \(NASB\)](#)

<sup>33</sup> “Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will not pass away.”

#### [2 Timothy 2:13 \(NASB\)](#)

<sup>13</sup> “If we are faithless, He remains faithful, for He cannot deny Himself.”

#### [Psalm 111:7 \(NASB\)](#)

<sup>7</sup> “The works of His hands are truth and justice; All His precepts are sure.”

### [DEEPER STUDY # 3](#)

#### [Romans 3:4 \(NASB\)](#)

<sup>4</sup> “May it never be! Rather, let God be found true, though every man be found a liar, as it is written, ‘THAT YOU MAY’” ([Romans 3:4](#)) **Judging—Judgment**: men judge God. They judge Him to be true or false. They judge whether He exists or does not exist. They judge His Word. But in the final hour, God will end up judging men. He will overcome all those who judged Him to be less than He is and less than what He said.

#### [Romans 2:2 \(NASB\)](#)

<sup>2</sup> “And we know that the judgment of God rightly falls upon those who practice such things.”

#### [Ezekiel 12:25 \(NASB\)](#)

<sup>25</sup> “For I the LORD will speak, and whatever word I speak will be performed. It will no longer be delayed, for in your days, O rebellious house, ‘I will speak the word and perform it,’ declares the Lord GOD.”

### [3. \(Romans 3:5-8\) Love—Justice: the question is, “Is God unjust if He takes vengeance?”](#)

#### [The Objection That Paul Attacked God’s Purity](#)

#### [Romans 3:5-8 \(NASB\)](#)

<sup>5</sup> “But if our unrighteousness demonstrates the righteousness of God, what shall we say? The God who inflicts wrath is not unrighteous, is He? (I am speaking in human terms.)

<sup>6</sup> May it never be! For otherwise, how will God judge the world?

<sup>7</sup> But if through my lie the truth of God abounded to His glory, why am I also still being judged as a sinner?

<sup>8</sup> And why not say (as we are slanderously reported and as some claim that we say), ‘Let us do evil that good may come’? Their condemnation is just.”

The third objection Paul anticipated was that his teaching attacked the very purity and holiness of God. The argument of his accusers would have been something like this:

If God is glorified by the sins of Israel, being shown faithful Himself despite the unfaithfulness of His chosen people, then sin glorifies God. In other words, Paul, you are saying that what God strictly forbids actually brings Him glory. You are saying that God is like a merchant

who displays a piece of expensive gold jewelry on a piece of black velvet so the contrast makes the gold appear even more elegant and beautiful. You are charging God with using man's sin to bring glory to Himself, and that is blasphemy. You are impugning the righteous purity of God. Not only that, but if man's **unrighteousness demonstrates the righteousness of God, what shall we say** about God's judgment? If what you say is true, why does God punish sin? **The God who inflicts wrath is not unrighteous, is He?**

Again lest his readers conclude that he was expressing his own thinking, Paul immediately adds the parenthetical explanation that he was **speaking in human terms**, that is, according to the **human** logic of the natural mind. He (Paul) was saying, in effect, "Don't think for a minute that I believe such perverted nonsense. I am only paraphrasing the charges that are often made against me."

If my unbelief and sin give God a chance to overcome (**Romans 3:4**) and to show His justice, then my sin brings greater glory to Him.

**Romans 3:4 (NASB)**

<sup>4</sup>"May it never be! Rather, let God be found true, though every man *be found* a liar, as it is written, 'THAT YOU MAY'

To intensify the disclaimer, Paul says again, "**May it never be!**" Obviously God does not encourage or condone sin in order to glorify Himself, **for otherwise how will God judge the world?**

It gives Him a chance to fulfill His Word. How can He punish me for that? Is He not unjust in inflicting punishment?

The answer is **fourfold**.

1. God forbid (***mē genoito***): away with such a thought! No! Never!
2. God is moral; therefore, He must judge the world. He would not be moral and just if He did not judge the world.
3. Such an argument is contradictory. Think about it. "If my sin and disobedience give God a chance to demonstrate His righteousness, why then am I called a sinner for that? My sin is really a good

thing. It gives God a chance to show how good He is. I may sin, yes, but only good has come out of it. When God accepts me as I am, a sinner, God has a chance to show how gloriously merciful He is. You can't condemn me for giving God a chance to show His mercy."

4. The damnation of persons who argue this point is **just**; it is not unjust. Such arguments are common among every generation of men, but the arguments are gross deceptions. A man exclaims: "A God of love cannot take vengeance. He is too good and loving. He will be denying His very nature of love if He judges me."

If Jews understood anything about the nature of God it was that He is a perfect judge. From the earliest part of the Old Testament He is called "**the Judge of all the earth**" (**Genesis 18:25**).

**Genesis 18:25 (NASB)**

<sup>25</sup>"Far be it from You to do such a thing, to slay the righteous with the wicked, so that the righteous and the wicked are *treated* alike. Far be it from You! Shall not the Judge of all the earth deal justly?"

The psalmists repeatedly refer to Him as a judge (see, e.g., **Psalm 50:6**; **Psalm 58:11**; **Psalm 94:2**).

**Psalm 50:6 (NASB)**

<sup>6</sup>"And the heavens declare His righteousness, For God Himself is judge."

**Psalm 58:11 (NASB)**

<sup>11</sup>"And men will say, 'Surely there is a reward for the righteous; Surely there is a God who judges on earth!'"

**Psalm 94:2 (NASB)**

<sup>2</sup>"Rise up, O Judge of the earth, Render recompense to the proud."

A major theme of virtually all the prophets is that of God's judgment—past as well as present, imminent as well as in the distant future. Paul's very obvious point is that God would have no basis for equitable, righteous, pure judgment if He condoned sin.

In **verses 7** and **8** the apostle reiterates the false charges against him in somewhat different terms. "You claim that I say, 'If through my **lie the truth of God abounded to His glory, why am I also still being judged a sinner?'**"

**Romans 3:7-8 (NASB)**

<sup>7</sup> **“But if through my lie the truth of God abounded to His glory, why am I also still being judged as a sinner?”**

<sup>8</sup> **“And why not say (as we are slanderously reported and as some claim that we say), ‘Let us do evil that good may come’? Their condemnation is just.”**

That was clearly a charge of antinomianism (disregard of God’s law) of the worst sort. The critics were accusing Paul of teaching that the more wicked a person is, the more he glorifies God; the more faithless a person is, the more faithful he makes God appear; the more a person lies, the more he exalts God’s truthfulness.

Those were not hypothetical misrepresentations, as Paul makes clear in his next statement: **“And why not say (as we are slanderously reported and as some affirm that we say), ‘Let us do evil that good may come’?”** ([Romans 3:8](#)) Paul’s enemies obviously had repeatedly charged that his gospel of salvation by grace through faith alone not only undermined God’s law but granted license to sin with impunity. In effect, they accused him of saying that, in God’s eyes, sin is as acceptable as righteousness, if not more so.

Although the scribes and Pharisees were themselves sinful and hypocritical to the core, they loved to condemn others for breaking the Mosaic Law and the rabbinical traditions even in the smallest degree. Their religion was legalism personified, and the idea of divine grace was therefore anathema to them, because it completely undermined the works righteousness in which their hope was founded.

The same legalism characterized the Judaizers, supposed Jewish converts to Christianity who insisted that Christians had to maintain all the Mosaic laws and ceremonies. Their charges against Paul’s gospel of grace were virtually identical to those of the scribes and Pharisees. The apostle therefore was attacked in much the same way both from within and without the church. It is therefore probable that Paul was addressing his arguments both to the Jewish leaders without and to the Judaizers within.

One of the most obvious characteristics of fallen human nature is its amazing ability to rationalize

sin. Even small children are clever at giving a good reason for doing a wrong thing. That, essentially, was what Paul’s opponents charged him with doing—rationalizing sin on the basis that it glorified God.

Later in the epistle Paul deals in detail with this same issue. After saying that,

[Romans 5:20-21 \(NASB\)](#)

<sup>20</sup> **“The Law came in so that the transgression would increase; but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more,**

<sup>21</sup> **so that, as sin reigned in death, even so grace would reign through righteousness to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.”**

[Romans 6:1-2 \(NASB\)](#)

<sup>1</sup> **“What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin so that grace may increase?**

<sup>2</sup> **May it never be! How shall we who died to sin still live in it?”**

With all the forcefulness he could muster, the apostle denounced the charge that he condoned any kind of sin. Least of all would he presume to justify sin by the spurious and vile argument that it brought glory to God.

It is possible, of course, that some of Paul’s accusers wrongly associated his teachings with that of libertines in the church, such as those who were a blotch on the church at Corinth.

Jude wrote of **“certain persons [who had] crept in unnoticed, those who were long beforehand marked out for this condemnation, ungodly persons who turn the grace of our God into licentiousness and deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ”** ([Jude 4](#)).

For a professed Christian to live in continual, unrepentant sin is a certain mark that he is not saved. To be a Christian is to be under the lordship of Jesus Christ and genuinely desire to serve Him. As Jude makes indisputably clear, the person who tries to justify his sin by presuming on God’s grace is ungodly and denies Christ (v. 4).

[Romans 3:4 \(NASB\)](#)

<sup>4</sup> **“May it never be! Rather, let God be found true, though every man *be found* a liar, as it is written, ‘THAT YOU MAY BE JUSTIFIED IN YOUR WORDS, AND PREVAIL WHEN YOU ARE JUDGED.’”**

Paul’s final response to his slanderous critics was

short but pointed. Although he was not the least guilty of teaching antinomianism, he fully concurred that for those who do teach it, **their condemnation is just.**

**Romans 3:8 (NASB)**

<sup>8</sup>“And why not *say* (as we are slanderously reported and as some claim that we say), ‘Let us do evil that good may come’? Their condemnation is just.”

What this argument fails to see is that *genuine love is just*. Love expressed unjustly is not love; it is license and indulgence. God’s love is perfect, absolutely unbiased and impartial. It is shed upon all (**John 3:16; 1 John 2:2**).

**John 3:16 (NASB)**

<sup>16</sup>“For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life.”

**1 John 2:2 (NASB)**

<sup>2</sup>“And He Himself is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for *those of the whole world*.”

It is not license and indulgence; neither can it be, not in its perfection. Neither can it allow license and indulgence. God’s love is completely and perfectly just. It demands justice. In no respect can it be unjust by failing to judge. Neither can God be accused of being unloving when He executes justice (**Romans 2:2-16**).

**Romans 2:2-16 (NASB)**

<sup>2</sup>“And we know that the judgment of God rightly falls upon those who practice such things.

<sup>3</sup>But do you suppose this, O man, when you pass judgment on those who practice such things and do the same *yourself*, that you will escape the judgment of God?

<sup>4</sup>Or do you think lightly of the riches of His kindness and tolerance and patience, not knowing that the kindness of God leads you to repentance?

<sup>5</sup>But because of your stubbornness and unrepentant heart you are storing up wrath for yourself in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God, <sup>6</sup>who WILL RENDER TO EACH PERSON ACCORDING TO HIS DEEDS:

<sup>7</sup>to those who by perseverance in doing good seek for glory and honor and immortality, eternal life;

<sup>8</sup>but to those who are selfishly ambitious and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, wrath and indignation.

<sup>9</sup>There will be tribulation and distress for every soul of man who does evil, of the Jew first and also of the Greek,

<sup>10</sup>but glory and honor and peace to everyone who does good, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.

<sup>11</sup>For there is no partiality with God.

<sup>12</sup>For all who have sinned without the Law will also perish without the Law, and all who have sinned under the Law will be judged by the Law;

<sup>13</sup>for *it is not* the hearers of the Law *who* are just before God, but the doers of the Law will be justified.

<sup>14</sup>For when Gentiles who do not have the Law do instinctively the things of the Law, these, not having the Law, are a law to themselves,

<sup>15</sup>in that they show the work of the Law written in their hearts, their conscience bearing witness and their thoughts alternately accusing or else defending them,

<sup>16</sup>on the day when, according to my gospel, God will judge the secrets of men through Christ Jesus.”

God’s love is just; God’s justice is the demonstration of perfect love. The cross was where God exacted His perfect justice upon His Son, and it is the perfect example of the glorious truth. The cross is the perfect demonstration of both the love and the justice of God.

**Thought 1.** The cross is the perfect demonstration of God’s love and justice.

**John 3:16 (NASB)**

<sup>16</sup>“For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life.”

**Romans 5:8 (NASB)**

<sup>8</sup>“But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.”

**2 Corinthians 5:21 (NASB)**

<sup>21</sup>“He made Him who knew no sin *to be* sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.”

**Galatians 3:13 (NASB)**

<sup>13</sup>“Christ redeemed us from the curse of the Law, having become a curse for us—for it is written, “CURSED IS EVERYONE WHO HANGS ON A TREE.”

**Ephesians 5:2 (NASB)**

<sup>2</sup>“And walk in love, just as Christ also loved you and gave Himself up for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God as a fragrant aroma.”

**1 Peter 2:24 (NASB)**

<sup>24</sup>“And He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross, so that we might die to sin and live to righteousness; for by His wounds you were healed.”

**1 Peter 3:18 (NASB)**

<sup>18</sup>“For Christ also died for sins once for all, *the just for the unjust*, so that He might bring us to God, having been put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit.”

**Thought 2.** Men shall be judged and condemned if they have rejected the love and salvation of God provid-



ed in His Son, Jesus Christ.

[Matthew 16:27 \(NASB\)](#)

<sup>27</sup>“For the Son of Man is going to come in the glory of His Father with His angels, and WILL THEN RE-PAY EVERY MAN ACCORDING TO HIS DEEDS.”

[Matthew 25:31-32 \(NASB\)](#)

<sup>31</sup>“But when the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the angels with Him, then He will sit on His glorious throne.

<sup>32</sup> All the nations will be gathered before Him; and He will separate them from one another, as the shepherd separates the sheep from the goats.”

[2 Corinthians 5:10 \(NASB\)](#)

<sup>10</sup>“For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad.”

[1 Peter 1:17 \(NASB\)](#)

<sup>17</sup>“If you address as Father the One who impartially judges according to each one's work, conduct yourselves in fear during the time of your stay *on earth*.”

[2 Peter 2:9 \(NASB\)](#)

<sup>9</sup>“Then the Lord knows how to rescue the godly from temptation, and to keep the unrighteous under punishment for the Day of Judgment.”

[2 Peter 3:7 \(NASB\)](#)

<sup>7</sup>“But by His word the present heavens and earth are being reserved for fire, kept for the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men.”

[Jude 1:14-15 \(NASB\)](#)

<sup>14</sup>“It was also about these men *that* Enoch, in the seventh *generation* from Adam, prophesied, saying, ‘Behold, the Lord came with many thousands of His holy ones,

<sup>15</sup> to execute judgment upon all, and to convict all the ungodly of all their ungodly deeds which they have done in an ungodly way, and of all the harsh things which ungodly sinners have spoken against Him.”

[Revelation 20:12 \(NASB\)](#)

<sup>12</sup>“And I saw the dead, the great and the small, standing before the throne, and books were opened; and another book was opened, which is *the book* of life; and the dead were judged from the things which were written in the books, according to their deeds.”

[Revelation 22:12 \(NASB\)](#)

<sup>12</sup>“Behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me, to render to every man according to what he has done.”

## CORAM DEO (Before the face of God)

### The Honor of Being a Slave (Part 2)

[Romans 1:1 \(NASB\)](#)

<sup>1</sup> Paul, a bond-servant of Christ

Jesus, called *as an apostle*, set apart for the gospel of God,

The word “slave” (*doulos*) in Greek and (*ebed*) in Hebrew means far more than just a servant. It *means* a slave totally possessed by the master. It is a *bond-servant* bound by law to a master. **Bondservant: *Doulos***, the common New Testament word for servant. Although in Greek culture it is most often referred to the involuntary, permanent service of a slave,

Paul elevates this word by using it in its Hebrew sense to describe a servant who willingly commits himself to serve a master he loves and respects ([Exodus 21:5-6](#); [Galatians 1:10](#); [Titus 1:1](#); cf. [Genesis 26:24](#); [Numbers 12:7](#); [2 Samuel 7:5](#); [Isaiah 53:11](#)).

[Exodus 21:5-6 \(NASB\)](#)

<sup>5</sup> “But if the slave plainly says, ‘I love my master, my wife and my children; I will not go out as a free man,’

<sup>6</sup> then his master shall bring him to God, then he shall bring him to the door or the doorpost. And his master shall pierce his ear with an awl; and he shall serve him permanently.

[Galatians 1:10 \(NASB\)](#)

<sup>10</sup> For am I now seeking the favor of men, or of God? Or am I striving to please men? If I were still trying to please men, I would not be a bond-servant of Christ.

[Titus 1:1 \(NASB\)](#)

<sup>1</sup> Paul, a bond-servant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ, for the faith of those chosen of God and the knowledge of the truth which is according to godliness,

[Genesis 26:24 \(NASB\)](#)

<sup>24</sup> The Lord appeared to him the same night and said, “I am the God of your father Abraham; Do not fear, for I am with you. I will bless you, and multiply your descendants, For the sake of My servant Abraham.”

[Numbers 12:7 \(NASB\)](#)

<sup>7</sup> Not so, with My servant Moses, He is faithful in all My household;

[2 Samuel 7:5 \(NASB\)](#)

<sup>5</sup> “Go and say to My servant David, ‘Thus says the Lord, “Are you the one who should build Me a house to dwell in?’

[Isaiah 53:11 \(NASB\)](#)

<sup>11</sup> As a result of the anguish of His soul, He will see *it and* be satisfied; By His knowledge the

**Righteous One, My Servant, will justify the many, As He will bear their iniquities.**

A look at the slave market of Paul's day shows more clearly what Paul meant when he said he was a **"slave of Jesus Christ."**

1. The slave was owned by his master; he was totally possessed by his master. This is what Paul meant. Paul was purchased and possessed by Christ. Christ had looked upon him and had seen his degraded and needful condition. And when Christ looked, the most wonderful thing happened: Christ loved him and bought him; therefore, he was now the possession of Christ.

2. The slave existed for his master and he had no other reason for existence. He had no personal rights whatsoever. The same was true with Paul: he existed only for Christ. His rights were the rights of Christ only.

3. The slave served his master and he existed only for the purpose of service. He was at the master's disposal any hour of the day or night. So it was with Paul: he lived only to serve Christ—hour by hour, day by day, and night by night.

4. The slave's will belonged to his master. He was allowed no will and no ambition other than the will and ambition of the master. He was completely subservient to the Master and owed total obedience to the will of the master. Paul belonged to Christ. In fact, he said that he fought and struggled **"to bring every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ"** ([2 Corinthians 10:5](#)).

5. There is a fifth and most precious thing that Paul meant by **"a slave of Jesus Christ."** He meant that he had the highest and most honored and kingly profession in all the world. Men of God, the greatest men of history, have always been called **"the servants of God."** It was the highest title of honor. The believer's slavery to Jesus Christ is no cringing, cowardly, or shameful subjection. It is the position of honor—the honor that bestows upon a man the privileges and responsibilities of serving the King of kings and Lord of lords.

Moses was the *slave* of God ([Deut. 34:5](#); [Psalm 105:26](#); [Malachi 4:4](#)).

Joshua was the *slave* of God ([Joshua 24:29](#)).

David was the *slave* of God ([2 Samuel 3:18](#); [Psalm 78:70](#)).

Paul was the *slave* of Jesus Christ ([Romans 1:1](#); [Phil. 1:1](#); [Titus 1:1](#)).

James was the *slave* of God ([James 1:1](#)).

Peter was the *slave* of Jesus Christ ([2 Peter 1:1](#)).

Jude was the *slave* of God ([Jude 1](#)).

The prophets were the *slaves* of God ([Amos 3:7](#); [Jeremiah 7:25](#)).

Christian believers are said to be the slaves of Jesus Christ ([Acts 2:18](#); [1 Cor. 7:22](#); [Ephes. 6:6](#); [Col. 4:12](#); [2 Tim. 2:24](#)).



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## Hebrews 12 – Overview Part 1

In this study we begin the overview of [Hebrews 12](#). If you were a serious student of Scripture and had been studying Hebrews chapter by chapter, it would be readily apparent to you that [Hebrews 12](#) is much different than any of the previous eleven chapters. The first ten chapters all talk in one way or another about the high priestly ministry of Christ. Everything, literally everything with the single exception of the parenthesis of [Hebrews 6](#), is in one way or another pointing the reader to Christ and His high priestly work on their behalf. Then there is [Hebrews 11](#) and it is only about one thing – biblical faith. It has a very different focus than did the first ten chapters. In some ways, and I know this is not accurate, but it almost seems to be out of character with the first ten chapters. Then we come to [Hebrews 12](#) – and it is quite different than anything that has preceded it. To begin with, it is full of exhortations. [Hebrews 12:1](#) begins with an exhortation – “**lay aside every weight**”. Then it encourages the reader to “**run with endurance the race that is set before us**”. It actually has at least twelve specific exhortations – more than any other chapter. In fact,

there have only been approximately fifteen exhortations through the first eleven chapters, and some chapters did not have any exhortations whatsoever. Then to make it even more noticeable, the author talks about subjects that have not even been previously addressed – such as God’s chastening and the significance of the believer developing endurance in their life. The one area that is somewhat similar to the previous chapters is that this chapter contains the final warning of Hebrews found in [Hebrews 12:25](#). There are no promises, no reproofs, and the doctrinal emphasis is minimal and very different compared to the other chapters and their content. In the other chapters, the doctrine was primarily related to the person and work of Christ, but here in [Hebrews 12](#) the emphasis shifts from Christ to the believer. That is why there are so many exhortations in this one chapter alone.

It is important to appreciate that most all of the doctrinal books of the New Testament are built the same way. They communicate doctrine first, and then they present the exhortations or the practical outworkings of that doctrine in the believer’s life. One of the basic principles that is critical to understand about the Scriptures is that doctrine is for living. Until doctrine becomes practical in a believer’s life, they simply do not understand it. For all practical purposes, doctrine is not real for the believer until they are applying it in a practical way in their life.

Now, there are five key ideas in [Hebrews 12](#) that need to be grasped. First of all, every Christian needs to understand the significance of developing spiritual endurance in their life. Secondly, in order to do that, they must come to terms with learning how to lay aside those things in their life that are actually hindering them in their faith and in their walk. It could be anything – good or bad. Thirdly, they have to learn that God’s discipline in their life is a normal and healthy part of the Christian life. Fourthly, the believer must learn the defiling effect that bitterness will have not only on their life, but also on the life of other people that surround them. And then fifthly, be careful that you do not refuse God when He speaks.

Now, [Hebrews 12:1](#) seems to set the tone for the rest of the chapter with its two exhortations. It says,

**<sup>1</sup>Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us,**

**and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us,**

Immediately we are confronted with the idea that we are actually in a spiritual “**race**”, but it seems that the writer’s audience is most likely individuals who may have made a genuine profession of faith, but for whatever reason, they simply are not in the race. The Christian life is often spoken of in Scripture as a “**race**”. For instance, in [2 Timothy 4:7](#), Paul said these words,

**<sup>7</sup>I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.**

There is nothing easy about this word “**race**”. The actual biblical word for “**race**” is the Greek word “*agon*” from where we get the English word “*agony*” or “*agonize*”. Often times in the New Testament it is actually translated as “**conflict**”. It is a word that implies a struggle, contending, being afflicted, having adversaries, and having inward and outward conflicts. There is nothing easy in the definition of the word “*agon*”. A race is demanding, strenuous, and sometimes very grueling. It requires the utmost in self-discipline, determination, and perseverance. I hope that you appreciate the idea of being a Christian and being in a race is not a spiritual charade. We are not giving mouth to mouth resuscitation to a dummy. This is the real thing and it involves real people. The people involved in the race are not make believe. In the end they are either lost or saved. They either die and go to heaven, or they die and are cast into the Lake of Fire. This is a real race, and it is not a race in which a believer can just trot, sit still, or just stand on the sidelines.

The problem for the writer, however, is that it appears that the ones to whom he is writing are still spectators. They are watching everyone else run the race. They have a nice seat in the stands, they have bought some refreshments, and they are sitting in the shaded area just watching everyone else run the race. Well, why is that? Why does this seem like such an accurate assessment of the Christian life for many professing believers? It is because they do not really realize that the Christian life is a “**race**”. Something is hindering them, something is holding them back, and something is impeding any real progress on their part. Something is encumbering them and obstructing them, and unfortunately, they have

become very satisfied with just being a Christian spectator.

Now, there are two things in [Hebrews 12:1](#) that the author states that we are to “**lay aside**”. The first is what he calls “**every weight**” and the second is what he calls “**the sin which so easily ensnares us**”. However, before we can examine those two encumbrances, we must first understand what it means to “**lay aside**”. The verb literally means to put off, to throw away, to cast aside. Throughout the New Testament there are many places where the believer is encouraged to “**lay aside**” certain things, to cast them aside. [Romans 13:12](#) says,

**<sup>12</sup>The night is far spent, the day is at hand. Therefore let us cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armor of light.**

[Ephesians 4:22](#) says,

**<sup>22</sup>that you put off, concerning your former conduct, the old man which grows corrupt according to the deceitful lusts,**

[Colossians 3:8-10](#) says,

**<sup>8</sup>But now you yourselves are to put off all these: anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy language out of your mouth. <sup>9</sup> Do not lie to one another, since you have put off the old man with his deeds, <sup>10</sup> and have put on the new *man* who is renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him who created him,**

[1 Peter 2:1](#) says,

**<sup>1</sup>Therefore, laying aside all malice, all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and all evil speaking,**

Now, in order for any of these exhortations to actually become an encouragement and benefit for us, it is important to understand the tense of the actual verb. I know that the technical nuances may not be that interesting to many, but in reality they are what convey the actual meaning of the word. If we do not take the time to understand what is being said technically, then in essence we will not have the correct meaning. The verb “**lay aside**” is in the aorist tense, middle voice. The aorist tense speaks of an effective, once for all action. It is something that has taken place in the past, but it is having an impact on the present. The middle voice, however, is what is critical to understand. With the middle voice, the subject initiates the action and participates in the action. Put another way, the action that needs to be

accomplished is accomplished by the subject - or in this case by the believer. I.e., when the writer says to “**lay aside**”, it is something that a believer has to do. God is not going to do this for you. If there is something in your life that is outside of the boundaries of God’s Word, God is not going to remove that hindrance or that sin from your life. You are responsible for your Christian life. If you do not remember anything else in this study, I want you to appreciate that you are the one that has to live the Christian life. God will strengthen you, give you wisdom, and help you as you go forward, but you have to make the decisions and the choices that God places before you in His Word. Then you personally have to incorporate God’s Word into your life. If you are waiting for God to do everything for you, trust me, but it will be a long, long wait!

Now, at this point in the discussion, you are going to have to make a decision. The Word of God is going to place you at a crossroads, and it is going to force you to make that decision just by the simple fact that the subject of laying things aside is even being addressed. This issue of laying aside those things that hinder you is not something that God is going to do for you. This is something that you have to do, and in my mind it has serious spiritual ramifications that become even clearer as we continue on through the chapter. For instance, the next section, [Hebrews 12:4-11](#), speaks of God’s discipline, or “**chastening**” on the believer’s life, and in my mind the reason for the discipline is directly linked to [Hebrews 12:1](#) - a believer deciding not to remove harmful things from their life. [Hebrews 12:1](#) is what actually sets the tone for the remainder of the chapter. Then, there is the last and final warning given in [Hebrews 12:25](#) which says that we need to see to it that we “**do not refuse Him who speaks**”. The word “**refuse**” actually means to reject, to ignore, and to shun what God has said. This is exactly what many Christians do. They selectively pick and choose what they want to obey and what they do not want to obey and then proceed accordingly. There is nothing Christian about that approach at all. At some time in our life, if we sincerely want to live the Christian life the way that God intended for it to be lived, then we must decide that we are simply going to do what God’s Word clearly calls on us to do. Anything less is a subtle form of spiritual rebellion, and in my understanding opens the door for God’s discipline on

our life. God will never chasten you for obedience, only disobedience and refusing Him when He speaks to your life.

At a personal level, I have absolutely no idea what God’s discipline may be, but what I do know is found in [Hebrews 12:11](#) where it clearly states that “**no chastening seems to be joyful for the present, but painful**”. What the word “**painful**” means is that it is something that creates grief, heaviness, and sorrow in a believer’s life. In fact, it is often translated as heaviness, sorrow, or grief. No matter what we think it is, it is always “**painful**”. Trust me, but the last thing that we want to do is to place our life in such a position that God has to chasten and discipline us because we were not willing to “**lay aside**” different things in our life that we needed to “**lay aside**”. Whatever the discipline is, be assured that it will be painful and something that will cause grief and sorrow in our life.

Now, the first thing that the author says that we are to lay aside is what he calls “**every weight**”. The word simply means bulk or mass, and it refers to things that encumber someone. Strong’s says that it means anything that is a burden or a hindrance. It refers to anything in our life that will impede us spiritually. In the context of [Hebrews 12:1](#), it refers to anything that the athlete might have that would encumber them from running. It could have been heavy shoes, too many clothes, or just too much personal weight. However, in the spiritual sense, it refers to anything that takes away your spiritual sensitivity. It may be something that is perfectly legitimate. I.e., it may be fine for someone else, but it hinders you, it encumbers you, and it takes away your spiritual edge and destroys your hunger to know God and to walk with God. It could literally be anything – recreational activities, television, hobbies, your career, friends, making money. It could literally be anything.

I knew a guy once who was literally consumed with making money. He had several business going at one time and literally had no time for his family or for God. He eventually went bankrupt. He worked as hard as you can work, but in the process he lost perspective on what was really important in his life. Some people are addicted to the Internet. I know one lady whose husband says that as soon as she gets home every night and gets some food on the table that she gets on the Internet to shop. She literally spends almost every night shopping and ordering things on the Internet. For her per-

sonally, it has become a weight, an encumbrance. I love to play golf, but it would be a tremendous hindrance to my life if I had to play every afternoon or every week for that matter. Are any of these things wrong – working hard, shopping on the Internet, or playing golf? Not in and of themselves, but they are if they hinder me from following Christ and living out the Christian life in a way that is pleasing to God.

You see, a weight represents anything – good or bad – that hinders you, that holds you back, and that keeps you from following God with all of your heart. It represents anything that can absorb both your time and attention and that causes you to lose interest in the things of God and to lose your perspective on what it truly means to be a fully devoted follower of Jesus Christ. For some of you, it may be a good thing to simply make out a schedule of your week and see how you spend your time and what you spend your time on. If you did that, I imagine that some of you may be surprised at how little time you actually give to the things of God in your life – but not because you are doing anything bad or wrong. It could be anything that robs you of your spiritual hunger for the things of God. It could be anything that decreases your spiritual appetite, or anything that absorbs so much of your time that you literally have no time for God. Now, listen very carefully. **God says to lay it aside, to put it off.** This is not my encouragement to you, but rather this is clearly what God says to do. Why? It is because certain things in your life are hindering you, keeping you from growing as a Christian, keeping you busy with temporal things, and ultimately keeping you from being obedient and faithful to God. Put it down, lay it aside.

The next thing that the author says to “**lay aside**” is “**the sin which so easily ensnares**”. In the first encouragement, the author is referring to things in general, but in this phrase he is referring to very **specific** areas of our life that have become a great hindrance to us. That is why he specifically calls it “**the sin**”, not “the sins”. It is what I would call a spiritual Achilles heel – that one sin or that one habit in our life that we are not willing to let God have. We have found a way to justify it, to rationalize it away, to ignore it, to defend it, to excuse it, to support it, and to explain it away. We have found a spiritually

non-rational way to simply tell God that we are not going to submit that part of our life to Him. We deeply believe that He is a loving God and a God that forgives, so we just become comfortable in being clearly disobedient and subtly rebellious in that area of our life – and then we use His love and forgiveness to justify what we are doing. We have become comfortable with sin, and somehow think that in the end that it will be okay. Honestly, nothing could be further from the truth.

I have no means of fully understanding how God ultimately and finally deals with sin in the life of a believer. For the lost man, I understand. He simply dies in his sins and is eternally separated from God in a place of indescribable torment. However, for the believer, the loss is simply magnified and compounded because of what he could have had. Eternal rewards are lost in the eternal state, and very often serious consequences are experienced in the present state. We have no way of quantifying what the results of our spiritual stubbornness may be, but it is always a more significant loss than we may imagine.

I often think about something like smoking. My son and I played in a golf tournament recently, and we were paired with two other men – one whom I knew. Unfortunately he was undergoing chemotherapy for bladder cancer. His hair was all gone and he had to travel every three weeks for several days to a cancer center on the other side of Atlanta. All during the round, he was smoking cigarettes. He must have smoked at least 10-12 cigarettes during that round of golf. Here was a man undergoing chemotherapy for cancer and smoking like a freight train. Its long term effects are lung disease, cancer, accelerated aging, heart disease, a likely early death, and who knows what else. I know this will be a very broad statement that may not be readily appreciated, but it is my opinion that the average American Christian too often fits comfortably into this description. It is a place of spiritual denial where the justification of their sins has become so diluted and tempered that they no longer even feel it necessary to repent of what it is that they may be doing. Very often it may be a secret sin, it may be a bad and harmful habit, it may be a comfortable spiritual lethargy, or it may simply be a casual indifference to the Word of God. Whatever it is, God says to simply “**lay it aside**”.

The Greek word for “**easily ensnares**” is just one word and it means to encompass. It carries with it the idea of

becoming “**entangled**” in something. In fact, the NIV, AMP, and NASB actually translate it that way. It refers to those things in our life that are entangling us and slowing us down and hindering us from truly following Christ. It is a word that refers to a particular sin or a particular activity in our life that tremendously hinders us. That is why the meaning of “to encompass” is often used. It is something in your life that surrounds you, that has you covered, and is prevailing over your life. In essence, it is controlling you, controlling your time, controlling your emotions, and ultimately controlling your success. The term actually refers to a garment that is wrapped around your body and tied. It is some sin or activity in your life that ties you up, that wraps itself around your life and ultimately hinders you greatly. It could be anything really. It could be anger, having to speak your mind about everything, laziness, overworking, spending too much time watching television, some hobby, or some recreational activity. Literally, it could be anything.

**Hebrews 3:12-13** are very interesting verses and say,

**<sup>12</sup>Beware, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God; <sup>13</sup> but exhort one another daily, while it is called “Today,” lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.**

Sin is deceitful. The word “**deceitfulness**” actually means “tricky”. When a person actually becomes hardened, they rarely are aware of it. The individual can hear the truth time and time again, but just not respond to it. Someone may ask the question, “*Well, how do I know if I have been spiritually hardened?*” and I think the answer to that question is really very easy to answer. Can you hear the word of God over and over and yet find yourself never really responding to it in your life in a practical way? If that is the case, then most likely you have been spiritually “hardened” by some sin or some hindrance in your life. The word “**hardened**” means that the individual has become stubborn and resistive to responding to God’s Word. They know that it is the right thing to do – to respond to God’s Word, but they have become adept at just ignoring the commands and exhortations of Scripture. They have convinced themselves that for some reason they are the exception and that their situation war-

rants them not having to be that responsive. That is the “**deceitfulness of sin**” at work. **No Christian is exempt from obedience.** The obvious problem with sin is that it will always tell you that sin is not as bad as it is made out to be and that Jesus is not as important as the Bible says that He is. However, the very opposite is true. Sin is worse than you know and Jesus is much more important than you could ever imagine. We are just fooling ourselves and thinking in a spiritually irrational way if for some reason we think that we can just ignore God’s word in our life and it not have any effect on us or our children.

If I were to ask you to take a piece of paper and to write down what sin or hindrance it is in your life that easily besets, easily ensnares, or easily entangles you, what would you write down? What sin or hindrance in your life keeps coming back and back to hinder you in your walk with God? What sin or habit in your life are you simply not willing to give up? What habit – yelling at your kids, being angry with people, refusing to dedicate consistent time with God, having to have life always revolve around what you want, being completely uninvolved in God’s work – what sin or habit is it that has you completely entangled? What is it in your life that is constantly robbing you of your spiritual appetite and always taking your time and attention so that you have no time for God or His Word? Once again, whatever it is, God says to lay it aside, to cast it off, to put it off. Do whatever you have to do to rid your life of whatever it is that is hindering you spiritually.

Let me offer three simple suggestions to maybe help in this effort.

First, **choose the right friends for your life.** Make sure that your friends are committed to the same spiritual race and the same values that you are committed to. **1 Corinthians 15:33** says,

**<sup>33</sup>Do not be deceived: “Evil company corrupts good habits.”**

Most of the other translations are better than the NKJV and say that bad company corrupts good “**morals**” (NASB, ESV) and good “**character**” (NIV). If you do not think that your friends have an impact on your life, then you have already been deceived. If your friends do not share the same values that you do, it has the potential of hindering you spiritually. This is critical when it comes to choosing a marriage partner. Do

not become unequally yoked with an unbeliever. It can have a devastating effect on your life.

Secondly, **remove any harmful activities or habits from your life.** Just be intellectually and emotionally honest with yourself and identify all of those things, either good or bad, that are right now keeping you from walking faithfully with God – and then stop doing them. Write them down so that you can be consistently reminded of what is hindering you spiritually. It could be anything. It could be watching too much television, sleeping too much, playing too much golf, working too much. It could be blatant things like pornography or greed. Whatever it is, stop it. Remove it from your life.

Thirdly, **get some godly counsel and help if you need it.** Especially get some help for those secret and debilitating sins that really hurt you. They are what the Bible calls “**strongholds**”. If you do not deal with “**strongholds**” in your life, they will eventually become things that you become addicted to and things that literally control your life. Go to someone who is godly, someone you can trust and share what it is that is hurting you, and then let them begin to hold you accountable to becoming godly in that area of your life that is harming you. Get some help and do not wait to do it.

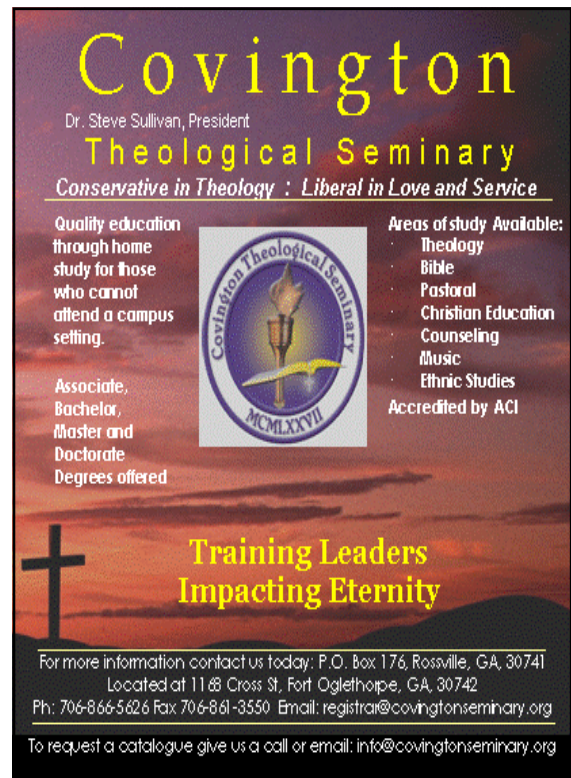
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