

Laying Aside the Sin that doth so easily beset us

The Christian, regardless of opposition by way of persecutions, tribulations, or obstacles, must persevere in the way of life which he has chosen. He must strive to abstain from all appearances of evil and pursue the path of duty as commanded by God. This requires spiritual understanding, patience and fortitude and above all the grace of God.

This was the essence of St. Paul's exhortation in his epistle to the Hebrew Christians when he stated: "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 12:1,2.

Earlier in chapter 11, the apostle had given a catalogue of worshippers of God who distinguished themselves in His service by virtue of their faith. These are examples for those serving God in later generations to continue in the race of life without being encumbered by sin, the obstacle to spiritual progress.

To lay aside means to put away, to get rid of, or to remove. The phrase "the sin that doth so easily beset us" is with particular reference to that temptation or sin which we always fall victim of; those vices or sinful habits which we seem to overlook either because of material benefits, negligence or carefree attitude. These vices include drunkenness, sexual immorality, lie telling, stealing or such like. Saint Paul is exhorting us to get rid of them for our own good by the grace of God.

Sin, according to the Bible, is the transgressing of the law of God, which debars one from entering the Kingdom of God. It was Isaiah the prophet who stated: "And an high way shall be there, and a way, and it shall be called the way of holiness: the unclean shall not pass over it .." (Isaiah 35: 8) Saint Paul asked: "Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God?" -1Corinthians. 6: 9.

For the fact that men are born in sin, the devil takes advantage of this frailty or weakness to hold them in spiritual bondage. It is therefore required of true Christians who are yearning for salvation in God's Kingdom fully established to be conscious of the sin or sins that so easily overwhelms them, and to make every effort to overcome such sins by the grace of God

False Pastors

Some pastors today give wrong interpretations to texts of the Bible for filthy lucre's sake. One of such texts is 1 John 2: 1, 2 where Apostle John stated: "My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. And he is the propitiation for our sins: and not for our's only, but also for the sins of the whole world." Some hold to the statement "if any man sin we have an advocate with the Father..." as meaning that as long as the Advocate, Christ Jesus, is there to plead for them, they will always get forgiveness, even without repentance. Such ones are thus emboldened to go on committing other sins after having claimed to have repented of a previous one. This is wrong. Without thorough repentance, no one will benefit from the redemptive work of Christ. It was in this sense David, a prophet and king in Israel declared: "If thou, LORD, shouldest mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand? But there is forgiveness with thee, that thou mayest be feared." – Psalm 130:3,4.

Saint John's admonition is not a license to continue in sin, for he started by saying "these things I write unto you that ye sin not". If he meant to encourage sinners he would not have said so. Apostle John further stated "And hereby we do know that we know him, if we keep his commandments". 1 John 2:3.

Any Christian therefore who for material benefits or out of sheer carelessness or negligence of his duty to God remains in sin will have himself to blame. It was king Solomon who stated: "There is a way that seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death". (Proverbs 14:12; 16: 25) The point that must be brought home to those who take pleasure in sin is that they are in danger of God's judgment. Christians must do away with or kill that "old man", the desire or tendency to sin, and do what is right always for their salvation. For any Christian to claim not to know the sin that easily besets him or her smacks of insincerity. Isaiah the prophet had cause to say: "For our transgressions are multiplied before thee, and our sins testify against us; for our transgressions are with us; and as for our iniquities, we know them." -Isaiah 59: 12.

Besetting Sins

In his letter to the Christians in Ephesus, Saint Paul sternly warned of the dangers of sin which will prevent one from being saved in the kingdom of God fully established. He admonished: "For this ye know, that no whoremonger, nor unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, hath any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God." -Ephesians 5: 1-5.

Sin separates one from God. (Isaiah 59:1,2) Anyone committing sin and remaining in it is in darkness, hence Apostle John stated: "This then is the message which we have heard of him and declare unto you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. If we say that we have fellowship with him and walk in darkness we lie and do not the truth." "He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him. But whoso keepeth his word, in him verily is the love of God perfected: hereby know we that we are in him." (1 John 1: 5, 6; 2: 4, 5) The reason is that though Christ died to redeem us from sin and death, any one who commits sin wilfully will not have forgiveness: "For if we sin wilfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins, but a fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries." (Hebrews 10: 26, 27) This admonition of Saint Paul to the Hebrew Christians is indicative of the fact that since we have been called by the Almighty God to the way of salvation through the belief of the truth, we should be steadfast in the faith till the end in order to get salvation.

The "besetting sins" that people fall victim of are many and they vary from one person to the other. One of the more common sins committed today is fornication. But many worshippers are not mindful of its consequences. "Every sin that a man doeth is without the body" said saint Paul, "but he that committeth fornication sinneth against his own body". It was because of fornication which the Jews committed in the wilderness that the Almighty God destroyed 23,000 of them in the days of Moses. (1 Corinthians 10: 5, 8.) Despite these examples, there are those who see nothing wrong in hopping from one spot to the other in search of loose men and women. Those who continue to indulge in the sin of fornication should know that unless they repent thoroughly of their sins they stand to lose eternal life. Saint Paul admonished: "But fornication, and all uncleanness or covetousness, let it not once be named among you as becometh saints." (Ephesians 5: 3; 1 Thessalonians 4: 3-7). Let us therefore be committed in the effort to rid ourselves of sins.

Paul the Apostle of God further enumerated some of these "besetting sins" in his admonition to the Christians in Colossae thus: "Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth; fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, and covetousness, which is idolatry...But now ye also put off all these, anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy communication out of your mouth. Lie not one to another, seeing that ye have put off the old man with his deeds. And have put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him." – Colossians 3: 5-10.

There are those who give themselves to drunkenness. They often boast of their ability to consume large quantities of alcohol without being intoxicated. This applies to men and women, young and old. Some people in the guise of taking native drugs made from the roots or barks of

certain trees – which need to be soaked in gin to be effective – actually consume large quantities of alcohol each day, and even get drunk in the process. The Bible enjoins moderation in all things. (Philippians 4:5) Any medicine that needs alcohol to be effective must be taken only as prescribed.

It must be pointed out nonetheless that it is not a sin to drink. St. Paul's admonition to Timothy to "take a little wine for thy stomach's sake and thine often infirmities" is of course well known. But the exhortation is not a license for anyone to become a drunkard. The Bible enjoins us not to drink in excess. (Ephesians 5:18; 1 Corinthians 6:9,10; Proverbs 23: 19-35) It is even better if one can avoid alcohol altogether, and become a teetotaler.

There are many Christians who are guilty of filthiness or uncleanness. This is also sinful. In Saint Paul's second letter to the Corinthians he said: "Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God." (2 Corinthians 7: 1) Filthiness of the spirit includes hatred. Some hate their fellow men without reason; and when you ask them their response is usually "well that is how I am born". This is not an attribute to make boast of but a vice that should be done away with. Anyone who harbours such traits should change by the grace of God for his own good. Saint John admonished: "Whosoever hated his brother is a murderer: and ye know that no murderer hath eternal life abiding in him." (1 John 3: 15) Other examples of spiritual filthiness include witchcraft, necromancy and various occultic practices. Those who indulge in these very wicked practices will be punished by God except they repent. (Deuteronomy 18:10-12; Isaiah 8:19,20; etc.) Anyone being oppressed by witches and wizards should exercise strong faith in God as He alone is able to deliver His children from the devil and his agents. – Psalm 33:18,19; 34:17,19; John 10:27-29; 1 Peter 3:10-13.

Some people are physically filthy. Christians are seriously warned against uncleanness in Ephesians 5:5. People commonly say that "cleanliness is next to godliness". We should as children of light learn to be clean both in our minds and in our bodies always by the grace of God.

New Creatures

St. Paul reminded the Christians in Rome that by their conversion, as new creatures or worshippers of God, the old man (that is sinful habits in them) had been crucified with Christ, that the body of sin may be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin. (Romans 6: 6, 10-16) Verses 12-14 of the chapter under reference is rendered by the New King James Version thus: "Do not let sin control the way you live, do not give in to its lustful desires. Do not let any part of your body become a tool of wickedness, to be used for sinning. Instead give yourselves completely to God since you have been given a new life. And use your whole body as a tool to do what is right for the glory of God. Sin is no longer your master, for you are no longer subject to the law, which enslaves you to sin. Instead you are free by God's grace." See also Romans 12:1,2; 1 Peter 4:1-3; 2 Corinthians 5:15; Galatians 5: 16, 17.

It is necessary therefore, that as children of God who have been bought with the precious blood of Jesus Christ the righteous, everything about us should conform with the life style of our Redeemer. Hence in verses 2 and 3 of Hebrews chapter 12 St. Paul charged us in this wise: "Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God. For consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds."

Anyone committing sin and remaining in it is in darkness hence Apostle John stated: "This then is the message which we have heard of him and declare unto you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. If we say that we have fellowship with him and walk in darkness we lie and do not the truth." -1 John 1: 5, 6; 1 John 2: 4, 5.

Resisting the devil

Whatever may be our vices, we should resolve to henceforth put them away. Some

people make resolutions vowing to forsake one bad conduct or habit or the other but they lack the will power to change their ways. They disobey the voice of their consciences, and so remain in sin to the detriment of their salvation. Christians should not just yield to sin or to temptations brought by the devil with the excuse that it is beyond them. The devil is a coward; if only we resist him in faith by the grace of God, he will certainly run away from us. Scripture says, "Resist the devil and he will flee from you". (James 4:7) Apostle James further stated: "Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man: But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed. Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death.... Blessed is the man that endureth temptation: for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him." -James 1: 13-15,12.

Saint Paul in his epistle to the Christians in Rome warned against the works of error. Said he: "The night is far spent, the day is at hand: let us therefore cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armour of light. Let us walk honestly, as in the day; not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and wantonness, not in envying. But put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lust thereof." – Romans 13: 12-14.