

CHAPTER EIGHTY-FOUR

THE OBJECT OF FAITH

([HEB. 12:2](#))

The verse which is now to engage our attention continues and completes the important exhortation found in the one which was before us in the last article. The two verses are so closely related that only the requirements of space obliged us to separate them. The latter supplies such a blessed sequel to the former that it will be necessary to present a summary of our comments thereon. We saw that the Christian life, the life of faith and obedience, is presented under the figure of a “race,” which denotes that so far from its being a thing of dreamy contemplation or abstract speculation, it is one of activity, exertion, and progressive motion, for faith without works is dead. But the “race” speaks not only of activity, but of *regulated* activity, following the course which is “set before us.” Many professing Christians are engaged in multitudinous efforts which God has never bidden them undertake: that is like running round and round in a circle. To follow the appointed track means that our energies be directed by the precepts of Holy Writ.

The order presented in [Hebrews 12:1](#) is the negative before the positive: there must be the “laying aside” of hindering weights, before we can “run” the race set

before us. This order is fundamental, and is emphasized all through Scripture. There must be a turning from the world, before there can be a real turning unto the Lord ([Isa. 55:7](#)); self must be denied before Christ can be followed ([Matthew 16:24](#)). There must be a putting off the old man, before there can be any true putting on of the new man ([Eph. 4:22–24](#)). There has to be a “denying ungodliness and worldly lusts,” before we can “live soberly, righteously and godly in this present world” ([Titus 3:12](#)). There has to be a “cleansing of ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit,” before there can be any “perfecting holiness in the fear of God” ([2 Cor. 7:1](#)). We must “be not conformed to this world,” before we can be “transformed by the renewing of our mind,” so that we may “*prove* what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God” ([Rom. 12:2, 3](#)).

Before the plants and flowers will flourish in the garden weeds must be rooted up, otherwise all the labors of the gardener will come to naught. As the Lord Jesus taught so plainly in the Parable of the Sower, where the “thorns” are permitted to thrive, the good Seed, the Word, is “choked” ([Matthew 13:22](#)); and it is very searching and solemn to note, by a careful comparison of the three records of it, that Christ interpreted this figure of the “thorns” more fully than any other single detail. He defined those choking “thorns” as “the *cares* of this life and the

deceitfulness of riches,” “the lust of *other* things and *pleasures* of this life.” If those things fill and rule our hearts, our relish for spiritual things will be quenched, our strength to perform Christian duties will be sapped, our lives will be fruitless, and we shall be merely cumberers of the ground—the garden of our souls being filled with briars and weeds.

Hence it is that the *first* call in [Hebrews 12:1](#) is “let us lay aside every weight.” “Inordinate care for the present life, and fondness for it, is a dead weight for the soul, that pulls it down when it should ascend upwards and pulls it back when it should press forwards” (Matthew Henry). It is the practical duty of *mortification* which is here inculcated, the abstaining from those fleshly lusts “which war against the soul” ([1 Pet. 2:11](#)). The racer must be as lightly clad as possible if he is to run swiftly: all that would cumber and impede him must be relinquished. Undue concern over temporal affairs, inordinate affection for the things of this life, the intemperate use of any material blessings, undue familiarity with the ungodly, are “weights” which prevent progress in godliness. A bag of gold would be as great a handicap to a runner as a bag of lead!

It is to be carefully noted that the laying aside of “every weight” *precedes* “and the sin which does so easily beset us”, which has reference to indwelling corruption. Each Christian imagines that he is

very anxious to be completely delivered from the power of indwelling sin: ah, but our hearts are very deceitful, and ever causing us to think more highly of ourselves than we ought to think. A criterion is given in this passage by which we may gauge the sincerity of our desires: our longing to be delivered from indwelling evil is to be measured by our willingness and readiness to *lay aside the “weights.”* I may think I am earnestly desirous of having a beautiful garden, and may go to much expense and trouble in purchasing and planting some lovely flowers; but if I am too careless and lazy to diligently fight the weeds, what is my desire worth? So, if I disregard that word “make not provision for the flesh unto the lusts thereof” ([Rom. 13:14](#)), how sincere is my desire to be delivered from “the flesh!”

“And let us run with patience the race that is set before us.” For this two things are needed: speed and strength—“rejoiceth as a *strong* man to run a race” ([Ps. 19:5](#)): the one being opposed to sloth and negligence, the other to weakness. These are the prime requisites: strength in grace, diligence in exercise. Speed is included in the word “run”, but how is the strength to be obtained? This “race” calls for both the doing and suffering for Christ, the pressing forward toward the mark set before us, the progressing from one degree of strength to another, the putting forth of our utmost efforts, the enduring unto the end. Ah, who is suffi-

cient for such a task? First, we are reminded of those who have preceded us, many, a “great cloud”: and *their* faith is recorded for our instruction, their victory for our encouragement. Yet that is not sufficient: their cases afford us a motive, but they do not supply the needed power. Hence, we are next told:

“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” (v. 2). “The cloud of witnesses is not the object on which our heart is fixed. They testify of faith, and we cherish their memory with gratitude, and walk with a firmer step because of the music of their lives. Our eye, however, is fixed, not on many, but on One; not on the army, but the Leader; not on the servants, but the Lord. We see Jesus only, and from Him we derive our true strength, even as He is our light of life” (Adolph Saphir). In all things Christ has the pre-eminence: He is placed here not among the other “racers,” but as One who, instead of exemplifying certain characteristics of faith, as they did, is the “Author and Finisher” of faith in His own person.

Our text presents the Lord as the supreme Example for racers, as well as the great Object of their faith, though this is somewhat obscured by the rendering of the A.V. Our text is not referring to Christ begetting faith in His people and sustain-

ing it to the end, though that is a truth plainly enough taught elsewhere. Instead, He is here viewed as the One, who Himself began and completed the whole course of faith, so as to be Himself the one perfect example and witness of what faith is. It was because of “the joy set before Him”—steadily and trustfully held in view—that *He* ran His race. *His* “enduring of the cross” was the completest trial and most perfect exemplification of faith. In consequence, He is now seated at the right hand of God, as both the Pattern and Object of faith, and His promise is “to him that overcometh will I grant to sit with Me in My throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with My Father in His throne” (Rev. 3:21).

It is to be duly noted that the little word “our” is a supplement, being supplied by the translators: it may without detriment, and with some advantage, be omitted. The Greek word for “Author” does not mean so much one who “causes” or “originates,” as one who “takes the lead.” The same word is rendered “*Captain* of our salvation” in Hebrews 2:10, and in Acts 3:15, the “*Prince* of life.” There its obvious meaning is Leader or Chief, one going in advance of those who follow. The Savior is here represented as the Leader of all the long procession of those who had lived by faith, as the great Pattern for us to imitate. Confirmation of this is found in the Spirit’s use of the personal name “Jesus” here, rather than His title of

office—"Christ." Stress is thereby laid upon His humanity. The Man Jesus was so truly made like unto His brethren in all things that the life which He lived was the life of faith.

Yes, the life which Jesus lived here upon earth was a life of faith. This has not been given sufficient prominence. In this, as in all things, He is our perfect Model. "By faith He walked, looking always unto the Father, speaking and acting in filial dependence on the Father, and in filial reception out of the Father's fullness. By faith He looked away from all discouragements, difficulties, and oppositions, committing His cause to the Lord, who had sent Him, to the Father, whose will He had come to fulfill. By faith He resisted and overcame all temptation, whether it came from Satan, or from the false Messianic expectations of Israel, or from His own disciples. By faith He performed the signs and wonders, in which the power and love of God's salvation were symbolized. Before He raised Lazarus from the grave, He, in the energy of faith, thanked God, who heard Him alway. And here we are taught the nature of all His miracles: He trusted in God. He gave the command, 'Have faith in God', out of the fullness of His own experience" (Adolph Saphir).

But let us enter into some detail. *What is a life of faith?* **First**, it is a life *lived in complete dependence upon God*. "Trust in the Lord with all thine heart, and lean not

unto thine own understanding ... in all thy ways acknowledge Him" ([Prov. 3:5, 6.](#)) Never did any so entirely, so unreservedly, so perfectly cast himself upon God as did the Man Christ Jesus; never was another so completely yielded to God's will. "I live by the Father" ([John 6:57](#)) was His own avowal. When tempted to turn stones into bread to satisfy His hunger, He replied "man shall not live by bread alone." So sure was He of God's love and care for Him that He held fast to His trust and waited for Him. So patent to all was His absolute dependence upon God, that the very scorers around the cross turned it into a bitter taunt.—"He trusted in the Lord that He would deliver Him, let Him deliver Him, seeing He delighted in Him" ([Ps. 22:8](#)).

Second, a life of faith is a life *lived in communion with God*. And never did another live in such a deep and constant realization of the Divine presence as did the Man Christ Jesus. "I have set the Lord *always* before Me" ([Ps. 16:8](#)) was His own avowal. "He that sent Me is *with Me*" ([John 8:29](#)) was ever a present fact to His consciousness. He could say, "I was cast upon Thee from the womb: Thou art My God from My mother's belly" ([Ps. 22:10](#)). "And in the morning, rising a great while before day, He went out, and departed into a solitary place, and there *prayed*" ([Mark 1:35](#)). From Bethlehem to Calvary He enjoyed unbroken and unclouded fellowship with the Father;

and after the three hours of awful darkness was over, He cried “Father, into Thy hands I commit My spirit.”

Third, a life of faith is a life lived *in obedience to God*. Faith worketh by love (Gal. 5:6), and love delights to please its object. Faith has respect not only to the promises of God, but to His precepts as well. Faith not only trusts God for the future, but it also produces present subjection to His will. Supremely was this fact exemplified by the Man Christ Jesus. “I do always those things which please Him” (John 8:29) He declared. “I must be about My Father’s business” (Luke 2:49) characterized the whole of His earthly course. Ever and anon we find Him conducting Himself. “that the Scriptures might be fulfilled.” He lived by *every* word of God. At the close He said, “I have kept My Father’s commandments, and abide in His love” (John 15:10).

Fourth, a life of faith is a life of *assured confidence in the unseen future*. It is a looking away from the things of time and sense, a rising above the shows and delusions of this world, and having the affections set upon things above. “Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen” (Heb. 11:1), enabling its possessor to live now in the power and enjoyment of that which is to come. That which enthralls and enchains the ungodly had no power over the perfect Man: “I have *overcome* the world” (John 16:31), He declared. When

the Devil offered Him all its kingdoms, He promptly answered, “Get thee hence, Satan.” So vivid was Jesus’ realization of the unseen, that, in the midst of earth’s engagements, He called Himself “the Son of man which is in heaven” (John 3:13).

“And so, dear brethren, this Jesus, in the absoluteness of His dependence upon the Father, in the completeness of His trust in Him, in the submission of His will to that Supreme command, in the unbroken communion which He held with God, in the vividness with which the Unseen ever burned before Him, and dwarfed and extinguished all the lights of the present, and in the respect which He had ‘unto the recompense of the reward’; nerving Him for all pain and shame, has set before us all the example of a life of faith, and is our Pattern as in everything, in this too.

“How blessed it is to feel, when we reach out our hands and grope in the darkness for the unseen hand, when we try to bow our wills to that Divine will; when we seek to look beyond the mists of ‘that dim spot which men call earth,’ and to discern the land that is very far off; and when we endeavor to nerve ourselves for duty and sacrifice by bright visions of a future hope, that on this path of faith too, when He ‘putteth forth His sheep, He goeth before them,’ and has bade us do nothing which He Himself has not done! ‘I will put My trust in Him,’ He says first, and then He turns to us and commands, ‘Believe in God, believe also in Me’” (A.

Maclaren, to whom we are indebted for much in this article).

Alas, how very little real Christianity there is in the world today! Christianity consists in being conformed unto the image of God's Son. "Looking unto Jesus" constantly, trustfully, submissively, lovingly; the heart occupied with, the mind stayed upon Him—*that* is the whole secret of practical Christianity. Just in proportion as I am occupied with the example which Christ has left me, just in proportion as I am living upon Him and drawing from His fullness, am I realizing the ideal He has set before me. In Him is the power, from Him must be received the strength for running "with patience" or steadfast perseverance, the race. Genuine Christianity is a life lived in communion with Christ: a life lived by faith, as His was. "For to me to live is Christ" ([Phil. 1:21](#)); "Christ liveth in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God" ([Gal. 2:20](#))—Christ living in me and through me.

There are four things said in our text about the Savior's life, each of which we need to ponder carefully. **First**, *the motive or reason which prompted Jesus to do and suffer*, wherein He is presented as our example and encouragement: "who for the joy that was set before Him." Here is made known to us what was the final moving cause in His mind which sustained the Savior to a persevering performance of duty, and of the endurance of

all sufferings that duty entailed. Various definitions have been given of that "joy," and probably all of them are included within its scope. The glory of God was what the Redeemer preferred above all things: [Hebrews 10:5–9](#), but that glory was inseparably bound up with the personal exaltation of the Redeemer and the salvation of His Church following the accomplishment of the work given Him to do. This was "set before Him" in the everlasting covenant.

Thus the "joy" that was set before Jesus was the doing of God's will, and His anticipation of the glorious reward which should be given Him in return. [Hebrews 12:2](#) sustains the figure used in the previous verse: it is as the model Racer our Savior is here viewed. At the winning-post hung a crown, in full view of the racers, and this was ever before the eye of the Captain of our salvation, as He pursued the course appointed Him by the Father. He steadily kept before Him the cheering and blissful reward: His heart laid hold of the Messianic promises and prophecies recorded in Holy Writ: He had in steady prospect that satisfaction with which the travail of His soul would be fully compensated. By faith Abraham looked forward to a "City" ([11:10](#)); by faith Isaac anticipated "things to come" ([11:20](#)); by faith Moses "had respect unto the recompense of the reward" ([11:26](#)); and by faith, Jesus lived and died in the enjoyment of that which was "set before Him."

Second, He “endured the cross.” Therein we have *the Commander’s example to His soldiers* of heroic fortitude. Those words signify far more than that He experienced the shame and pain of crucifixion: they tell us that He stood steadfast under it all. He endured the cross not sullenly or even stoically, but in the highest and noblest sense of the term:—with holy composure of soul. He never wavered or faltered, murmured or complained: “The cup which My Father hath given Me, shall I not drink it” ([John 18:11](#))! And He has left us an example that we should “follow His steps” ([1 Pet. 2:21](#)), and therefore does He declare, “If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross” ([Matthew 16:24](#)). Strength for this task is to be found by “looking unto Jesus,” by keeping steadily before faith’s eye the crown, the joy awaiting us.

Third, “despising the shame.” Therein we see *the Captain’s contempt of whatever sought to bar His progress*. We scarcely think of associating this word “despising” with the meek and lowly Jesus. It is an ugly term, yet there are things which deserve it. The Savior viewed things in their true perspective; He estimated them at their proper worth: in the light of the joy set before Him, He regarded hardship, ignominy, persecution, sufferings from men, as trifles. Here, too, He has left us “an example.” But alas, instead of scorning it, we magnify and are intimidated by “the shame.” How many are ashamed to

be scripturally baptized and wear His uniform. How many are ashamed to openly confess Christ before the world. Meditate more upon the reward, the crown, the eternal joy—*that* outweighs all the little sacrifices we are now called upon to make.

Fourth, “and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God.” Here we witness *the Captain’s triumph*, His actual entrance into the joy anticipated, His being crowned with glory and honor. His “sitting down” denoted three things. **First**, rest after finished work, the race run. **Second**, being invested with *dominion*: He now occupies the place of supreme sovereignty: [Matthew 28:18](#), [Philippians 2:10](#). **Third**, being intrusted with the prerogative of *judgment*: [John 17:2](#), [Acts 17:30](#). And what have these three things to do with us, His unworthy followers? Much indeed: eternal rest is assured the successful racer: [Revelation 13:14](#). A place on Christ’s throne is promised the overcomer: [Revelation 3:21](#). Dominion too is the future portion of him who vanquishes this world: [Revelation 2:26, 27](#). Finally, it is written “Do ye not know that the saints shall judge the world? “Do ye not know we shall judge angels?” ([1 Cor. 6:2, 3](#)). “Joint heirs with Christ: *if so be that we suffer with Him*, that we may be also glorified together” ([Rom. 8:17](#)).

One other word in our text yet remains to be considered: “looking unto

Jesus the Author (Captain) and *Finisher* (Perfecter) of our faith.” We have already seen from the other occurrences of this term (in its various forms) in our Epistle, that it is a very full one. Here, we believe, it has at least a twofold force. First, Completer: Jesus is the *first and the last as an* example of confidence in and submission unto God: He is the most complete model of faith and obedience that can be brought before us. Instead of including Him with the heroes of faith in chapter 11, He is here distinguished from them, as being above them. He is the Alpha and Omega, the Beginning and the Ending: as there was none hitherto who could be compared with Him, so there will be none hereafter. “Author and Finisher” or “Captain and Completer” means Jesus is beyond all comparison.

The fact that we are bidden to be looking unto Jesus *as* “the Leader and Finisher of faith” also denotes that He perfects our faith. How? **First**, by His grace flowing into us. We need something more than a flawless Model set before us: who can in his own strength imitate the perfect Man? But Christ has not only gone before His own, He also dwells in their hearts by faith, and as they yield themselves to His control (and only so) does He live *through* them. **Second**, by *leading us* (Ps. 23:3) along the path of discipline and trial, drawing our hearts away from the things of earth, and fixing them upon Himself. He often makes us lonesome here that we

may seek *His* companionship. Finally, by actually conducting us to glory: He will “come again” (John 14:2) and conform us to His image.

“Looking unto Jesus.” The person of the Savior is to be the “mark” on which the eyes of those who are pressing forward for the prize of the high calling of God, are to be fixed. Be constantly “looking” to Him, trustfully, submissively, hopefully, expectantly. He is the Fountain of all grace (John 1:16): our every need is supplied by God “according to His riches in glory *by Christ Jesus*” (Phil. 4:19). Then seek the help of the Holy Spirit that the eye of faith be steadfastly fixed on Christ. He has declared “I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee,” then let us add, “The Lord is my Helper, I will not fear what man shall do unto me” (Heb. 13:5, 6). Salvation is by grace, *through faith*: it is through “faith” we are saved, not only from Hell, but also from this world (1 John 5:4), from temptation, from the power of indwelling sin—by coming to Christ, *trusting* in Him, drawing from *Him*.

What are the things which *hinder* us running? An active Devil, an evil world, indwelling sin, mysterious trials, fierce opposition, afflictions which almost make us doubt the love of the Father. Then call to mind the “great cloud of witnesses”: they were men of like passions with us, they encountered the same difficulties and discouragements, they

met with the same hindrances and obstacles. But they ran “with patience,” they overcame, they won the victor’s crown. How? By “looking unto Jesus”: see [Hebrews 11:26](#). But more: look away from difficulties ([Rom. 4:19](#)), from self, from fellow-racers, unto Him who has left us an example to follow, in whom dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily, so that *He is able* to succor the tempted, strengthen the weak, guide the perplexed, supply our every need. Let the heart be centered in and the mind stayed upon HIM.

The more we are “looking unto Jesus” the easier will it be to “lay aside every weight.” It is at this point so many fail. If the Christian denies self of different things *without an adequate motive (for Christ’s sake)*, he will still secretly hanker after the things relinquished, or ere long return to them, or become proud of his little sacrifices and become self-righteous. The most effective way of getting a child to drop any dirty or injurious object, is to proffer him something better. The best way to make a tired horse move more quickly, is not to use the whip, but to turn his head toward *home!* So, if our hearts be occupied with the sacrificial love of Christ for us, we shall be “constrained” thereby to drop all that which displeases Him; and the more we dwell upon the Joy set before us, the more strength shall we have to run “with patience the race that is set before us.”