

A Life Filled with Shadows

by D. Matthew Brown

Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us also lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us... (Hebrews 12:1)

There lies in this text the heart of Christianity—the very purpose of our lives and the very pitfall of modern-day Evangelicalism. There is great news in this text—exceedingly wonderful news. That great and wonderful news is that you do not have to go to your local Lifeway Christian Bookstore and shell out twenty dollars for a copy of Rick Warren's "Purpose Driven Life" in order to find out why God put you here and saved you. Your purpose in this life, Christian, is your sanctification. That is, you were put on this earth to glorify God by becoming holy as he is holy. You were put on this earth so that you, by the Spirit, would put to death the deeds of the body and thus become conformed to the image of Christ so that he would be the firstborn of many brothers and sisters in glory. It is that simple. Yet so many Christians today wish to complicate their purpose, which evidences itself in large, best-selling books that bring about cute coffee mugs and stationary.

The inherent problem in modern Christianity is not the lack of simplicity in living the godly life, it is the lack of Christians who are willing to cast aside their toys and fleeting pleasures in order to fix their eyes upon Jesus. The modern church is filled with persons squeezing their Bibles trying to find out what they are not supposed to do instead of persons trying to find out what can they could do to glorify and to enjoy Christ more. Most of what anyone hears any more are fundamental (or conservative) legalists that ask questions to exhaust their lists of self-righteousness. "Can I go to movie that is rated 'R' (or 'PG-13' nowadays)?" "Can I get away with wearing that to church?" "Can I watch this TV show?" "Can I kiss my opposite-sex friend before we get married?" "Can I play this video game?" and on and on. It is hardly ever, "How can I live my life in order that I might become holy as he is holy?"

Which brings us to this text in Hebrews. The Apostle had just finished offering in the preceding chapter a number of saints who had lived lives glorifying God and then points to Christians and commands, "Live like them." But how? The Apostle then says, "By laying aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily ensnares." Notice that there is a distinction made between the things that are to be cast aside. The latter is "sin," which is obvious, but the former is "every encumbrance." What did the Apostle mean by "every encumbrance"? The Apostle meant that Christians should cast aside anything that takes their eyes off of Christ and causes them to seek their joy elsewhere; for the following verse

says that we do this “[by] fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before him, endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.”

Christians are to live with their eyes fixed on Christ at all times. That is, everything that a Christian does in life should direct his soul to Christ. As the institutions of the Old Covenant, described earlier in Hebrews (i.e. the tabernacle, animal sacrifices, Levitical priesthood, etc.) existed to cast shadows of the heavenly realities in Christ, so everything in a Christian's life should cast shadows and point to Christ. Does watching television ultimately point you to Christ and cause you to glorify and to enjoy him more? If not, turn it off. Does the short skirt you wear ultimately point you to Christ and cause you to glorify and to enjoy him more? If not, throw it away. Does the college degree that you are pursuing ultimately point you to Christ and cause you to glorify and to enjoy him more? If not, change your course of studies. Does the girl/boyfriend that you have ultimately point you to Christ and cause you to glorify and to enjoy him more? If not, change something or end the relationship.

American "Christians" live as though tomorrow is guaranteed and as though they will have an opportunity to serve God later. To those many in this country, God will say, "Fool, this very night your soul is required of you, and who will own the toys you have acquired?" And when those same ones appear before his glorious throne and there think that they will enter into his kingdom by virtue of some prayer they prayed when they were eight years old, he will say to them, "Depart from me, you who practice lawlessness."