

Blindfolds and Weights

Have you ever awakened from a deep sleep in a completely dark room, and as a result become completely turned around and confused? Perhaps you were attempting to go to the bathroom, but in the darkness and confusion wound up in a closet instead? And then, because of the utter disorientation of the moment, had trouble even finding your way back out of the closet? It is amazing (and embarrassing!) how difficult it becomes to navigate across even a familiar space for a short distance without a point of reference. A single ray of light, peeking through a window or doorway- even if it is opposite of the direction you're heading, provides enough orientation data to our internal gyroscope and compass to enable us to find our way. But in the absence of that orienting light, we can end up trying figure out how all these hanging clothes and shoes wound up in the bathroom!

Comparably, at least for our purposes here, have you ever been in a situation where you were going to have to traverse an abnormally long distance on foot? Perhaps your car broke down in a remote location and you had no choice but to "foot it" for several miles? I did, except it was a motorcycle. Knowing it was three to five miles back to house, I pushed the bike out of sight of any potential passersby, and emptied my pockets and person of everything but the barest of essentials (clothes and shoes), then took off on my forced run! I really pushed myself to get home (and back) as quickly as possible. And in order to do so, I left behind everything non-essential to the task.

Now, what have these two scenarios to do with each other, or spiritual matters? Note Heb.12:1-2 in these regards, "...*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, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and finisher of faith...*" Who would ever imagine running a race wearing a blindfold and/or carry barbells? And yet, that is exactly what some of us attempt to do. How so?

We run our spiritual race of life *encumbered* (*ogkos-* a weight or mass, thus a burden or encumbrance that hinders). Though Heb.12:1 obviously includes "sin" as something that "entangles" and thus restricts our running, since it is mentioned separately from "encumbrances," they are not exactly the same. Thus, these encumbrances are basically any extra weight that makes running your race more difficult, or causes you to stumble. Though the metaphor is slightly different, Jesus said such "stumbling-blocks" are "inevitable," but He also said (using hyperbole) that if "your hand or foot" (or even "your eye") causes you to stumble, cut it off and throw it from you..." cf. Matt.18:7-9. So what's the take-away from these things? 1) We should certainly "put off" or "lay aside" sin (cf. Gal.5:17-21; Eph.4:22-31)- running our race with such "entanglements" is like trying to run through waist-high briars! And 2), Get rid of anything else that is perhaps not sinful itself but nonetheless weighs you down spiritually, thus encumbering your successful completion of the race, cf. Rom.13:14.

Now before we conclude, one more point from Heb.12:2 is necessary. Remember our first introductory illustration- waking up in a completely dark room and having no "point of reference" light to orient you. Note the specific language from v.2, "fixing our eyes on Jesus..." He is "the light of the world" (John 8:12) who as "the true light which, coming into the world, enlightens every man," John 1:9. When we awaken in spiritual darkness,

our blind stupor needs His light to provide orientation and direction to our race. Otherwise, we're just running blindfolded- and such always ends in *disqualification* (cf. 1Cor.9:24-27) and *destruction* (cf. Gal.6:8).

The “*race*” is set before each one of us. We can: 1) *Run* “our own way,” but such will not “*receive the prize*” of eternal life; 2) *Run* blindfolded by the *entanglements of sin*, but will certainly be bloodied and fall, perhaps never to *rise* and *run* again; 3) *Run* with *encumbrances* and *weights*, but will be much more successful, and much more likely to *finish the race* victoriously, if we *lay aside* all such obstacles and hindrances. (Philip C. Strong; Southport Church of Christ; 7202 Madison Ave, Indianapolis, IN 46227; online at southportcofc.org; email to mrpcstrong@hotmail.com)