

Hebrews 12:1

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

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,

Analysis

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. This verse employs athletic imagery to describe the Christian life as a disciplined race requiring endurance. The "cloud of witnesses" (nephos martyrōn, *νέφος μαρτύρων*) refers to the faithful saints catalogued in chapter 11 who testified to God's faithfulness through their lives. These aren't spectators watching us but witnesses whose lives testify to faith's power.

The athletic metaphor continues with "lay aside" (apothemenoi, *ἀποθέμενοι*), the same term for an athlete stripping off unnecessary clothing before competing. "Every weight" (onkon, *ὄγκον*) includes not just obvious sins but anything hindering spiritual progress—even good things that become weights. "The sin which doth so easily beset us" uses euperistaton (*εύπερίστατον*), meaning "easily entangling" or "clinging closely," describing sin's tendency to wrap around and trip us like loose garments.

"Run with patience" (di' hypomonēs trechōmen) combines active exertion (running) with patient endurance. The race is "set before us" (prokeimenon, *προκείμενον*), indicating God has appointed each believer's specific course. This isn't aimless running but purposeful pursuit of God's calling. The Christian life

requires both explosive effort and long-term endurance, stripping away everything that hinders single-minded devotion to Christ.

Historical Context

The original readers of Hebrews faced severe persecution for their Christian faith, likely under Nero (AD 64-68) or Domitian (AD 81-96). Many were tempted to return to Judaism to escape suffering. The athletic imagery would resonate powerfully, as the Greek games (including the Olympics) were well-known throughout the Roman Empire. Athletes underwent rigorous training and strict discipline, stripping down to essentials for competition.

The "cloud of witnesses" from Hebrews 11 included Old Testament saints who endured suffering without seeing the promised Messiah—a powerful rebuke to readers who had seen Christ yet considered abandoning faith. If Abel, Abraham, Moses, and others persevered through faith in promises they never saw fulfilled, how much more should believers persevere who have witnessed Christ's actual coming?

First-century Christianity required radical commitment. Believers faced loss of property, imprisonment, social ostracism, and death. The metaphor of laying aside "weights" wasn't abstract—some Jewish Christians clung to ceremonial law, temple worship, and cultural acceptance as weights preventing full commitment to Christ. The race required releasing these securities and running with endurance toward the heavenly prize.

Related Passages

John 15:13 — Greatest form of love

1 Corinthians 13:4 — Characteristics of love

Study Questions

1. What 'weights'—not necessarily sins but hindrances—are slowing your spiritual progress and need to be laid aside?
2. How do the lives of faithful believers (past and present) encourage you to persevere in your own race?
3. What specific sin 'easily besets' or entangles you, and what practical steps will you take to lay it aside?
4. How does viewing the Christian life as a marathon rather than a sprint change your expectations and approach?
5. In what areas are you running someone else's race instead of 'the race set before you' by God?

Interlinear Text

Τοιγαροῦν καὶ ἡμεῖς τοσοῦτον ἔχοντες περικείμενον
Wherefore also seeing we with so great are compassed about
G5105 G2532 G2249 G5118 G2192 G4029

ἡμῖν νέφος μαρτύρων ὅγκον ἀποθέμενοι πάντα καὶ τὴν
us a cloud of witnesses weight lay aside every also G3588
G2254 G3509 G3144 G3591 G659 G3956 G2532

εύπερίστατον ἀμαρτίαν δι' ὑπομονῆς τρέχωμεν
which doth so easily beset the sin with patience us and let us run
G2139 G266 G1223 G5281 G5143

τὸν προκείμενον ἡμῖν ἀγῶνα
that is set before us the race
G3588 G4295 G2254 G73

Additional Cross-References

2 Timothy 4:7 (Parallel theme): I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith:

Philippians 2:16 (Parallel theme): Holding forth the word of life; that I may rejoice in the day of Christ, that I have not run in vain, neither laboured in vain.

Luke 21:34 (Parallel theme): And take heed to yourselves, lest at any time your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting, and drunkenness, and cares of this life, and so that day come upon you unawares.

Galatians 5:7 (Parallel theme): Ye did run well; who did hinder you that ye should not obey the truth?

1 Peter 2:1 (Parallel theme): Wherefore laying aside all malice, and all guile, and hypocrisies, and envies, and all evil speakings,

Romans 12:12 (Parallel theme): Rejoicing in hope; patient in tribulation; continuing instant in prayer;

2 Corinthians 7:1 (Parallel theme): 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 Timothy 2:4 (Parallel theme): No man that warreth entangleth himself with the affairs of this life; that he may please him who hath chosen him to be a soldier.

James 1:3 (Parallel theme): Knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience.

Matthew 10:22 (Parallel theme): And ye shall be hated of all men for my name's sake: but he that endureth to the end shall be saved.