



THE PILE

It is not falling into the water, but lying in the water that drowns.

Thomas Brooks

OUT IN THE NORTH FIELD IN FRONT OF OUR HOUSE, beyond the lawn proper and near the orchard of apple, cherry and pear trees, is a growing brush pile of branches from trimmed trees, and detritus from last year's garden. Over the late summer to early winter as I trimmed or removed trees and bushes, and Linda cleared her garden, the pile grew to rather substantial proportions. And now it needs to be burned.

But, you see, I can't.

When a brush pile is begun—when the first load of branches is deposited onto the scorched circle of earth and gray ashes—because the wood and branches are usually green, it is not burned right away. It will burn much better if left for a while to dry out. As the days proceed more refuse is added to the pile, and still more, and *that* new brush is also allowed time to dry. And the pile gets taller and wider.

Meanwhile, as the dimensions of the brush pile increase, birds and rabbits make their home in the tangle of sticks and dried weeds. Pass by the pile and nesting birds flutter out, rabbits and mice scamper away. And where there are adults, babies will soon follow, and babies may not always be able to skip away to safety. Add to that our dry and windy summer and fall. In these conditions it was unsafe to burn the pile, which, once fully involved can become a raging—and dangerous—inferno.

Hence the problem. And so, as I wait for the opportune moment, the pile of refuse grows taller and taller.



Sin, too, has a habit of beginning small, just a little here, a little there. Too small even to notice, really. No big deal, and if a problem arises, well, I'll deal with it later. But it continues to grow and expand until, finally, we realize that something must be done. The encrustation of sin must be expunged.

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

But then, to our chagrin, we discover that the sin has been with us so long that it has taken root—it has woven itself so tightly into our

life that its removal will inevitably be painful surgery indeed. So we put it off again.

And it continues to grow.

In time the old sin attracts new sin, and the combination becomes a vast cancerous tumor that threatens to overwhelm our life. We wish it all to go away by itself, but it has made too much of an investment, and refuses. We try to pray it away, but still, back in the far reaches of our mind, we hold back. We wonder if that's really the answer; surely the sin has become so familiar, so comfortable—would we survive its extraction?

So we're left to wallow in the consequence of entrenched sin, and find ourselves in the unhappy predicament of having to choose between sin and righteousness. Do we do what is right, and accept the resulting pain of extraction? Or do we continue on, in discontented familiarity with our old comfortable ways?

Even so consider yourselves to be dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus. Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its lusts, and do not go on presenting the members of your body to sin as instruments of unrighteousness; but present yourselves to God as those alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God. For sin shall not be master over you, for you are not under law but under grace.

Romans 6:11-14