

VICTORY OVER THE INNER CONFLICT

by
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AUTHOR'S PREFACE

After spending some two years in bondage, trying to be the perfect Christian, by overcoming the flesh, by the flesh, God delivered me out of this grave by His Spirit and the power of His Word.

INTRODUCTION

In perceiving the great amount of bondage in the body of Christ today and the devastation of trying to overcome the inner conflict by our own ability, rather than by the Spirit of God; I see a need to understand the liberty God has provided us through His Son, Jesus Christ.

Dedicated to the body of Christ, that all saints may live in liberty and victory in Christ.

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Scriptures quoted are taken from the New American Standard Version of the Bible.

I. THE INNER CONFLICT

The thoughts here are based on Romans Chapters 7 & 8; Galatians Chapter 5; 1John Chapter 3.

We shall start our examination of the text in Romans Chapter 7. Verse 1 says that the law has jurisdiction over a person as long as he lives. In verse 4 we read that we are made to die to the Law through the body of Christ, that we would be joined to Him who was raised from the dead. Let us be reminded here that the Law came in that sin would increase or that I, through the Law, would have knowledge of sin (Romans 7:7). In verse 14 we see that the Law is spiritual, but we are of flesh, sold into bondage to sin. When Adam fell, he actually gave his flesh to the devil by disobedience to God's command not to eat of the tree of knowledge of good and evil. He chose for us a separation from God's perfect will.

Let us take a simple look at ourselves when we are born into the world. In the natural man the flesh [self-will], controls the soul-mind, and the soul-mind, controls the spirit. In the spiritual man the Holy Spirit controls our soul-mind which takes control of the flesh, i.e., the old nature. In our natural birth our flesh [which Paul says is sin] actually controls our mind, which quenches our spirit. God desires our spirit, in that His Spirit will take control of our mind, renewing or making it new; then by the Spirit we will overcome the deeds of the flesh (Romans. 8:13, 12:2).

What is revealed in Romans Chapter 7 is that we are spiritual beings living in bodies of flesh, the spirit being holy and the flesh sinful. Now I know that this may be hard for some to grasp, but as you understand this, you will be

able to see the war that is within the members of our body. In (Ephesians 6:12), we see that we struggle not against flesh and blood, but against rulers, powers, world darkness, and spiritual forces. Adam allowed the bondage of the enemy to come into our flesh when he sinned.

I believe it is very important to understand that we are not to be fighting against this flesh and blood. We find ourselves caught up in this area so much that we cannot possibly live in liberty or victory. How much of the time do we find ourselves doing as (Romans 8:6) says, "The mind set on the flesh is death; but the mind set on the spirit is life and peace." There is no life or peace with our mind set on our flesh; yet I find so many Christians with their minds set on their own flesh, trying to perfect it by the flesh (Galatians 3:1-3). It will never happen; nor will peace of mind come. Picking up again in verse 14, we hear Paul telling us that he doesn't understand. He is not practicing what he wants to do, but doing the very thing he hates [sound familiar?]. If I do the thing I do not wish to do, I agree with the Law, confessing that it is good; or that the law brings me to the knowledge of my sin. So now it is no longer I [the real me, my spirit] doing it, but sin which indwells me. I know nothing good dwells in me; that is in my flesh, for the desire is present in me but the doing of good is not.

Paul repeats the same thought again in verses 19-22. What is he saying? Simply that the flesh is sinful and is going to sin because it is sold into bondage to Satan. In verse 23 we see a law [sin] in the members of our bodies, waging war against the law of our mind and making us prisoners of the law of sin in our members. Verse 5, chapter 8 reminds us that the flesh directs our mind to the flesh, our natural condition at birth. Verse 7 says "the mind set on the flesh is hostile toward God; it does not subject itself to the law of God for it is not able to do so." Our natural mind is not able to overcome the flesh or bring it under control. Do you see what is being brought out here? In verse 24 Paul now asks the question, "Wretched man that I am! Who will set me free from this body of death?" The answer is "Jesus Christ our Lord!" He goes on to explain that on one hand I myself [my spirit] with my mind am serving God, but on the other with my flesh the law of sin.

As was stated before, we are spiritual beings [holy before God] living in bodies of flesh which are sinful. Now this may be shocking to some--that our flesh is not able to please God, in fact it is in direct opposition to the Holy Spirit (Galatians 5:17). Because of our close tie to the flesh, we try to make it pleasing to God, normally by our own efforts or by trying to use the Holy Spirit to help us. We know our flesh desires to sin, and the Devil gets us to see that also. Then we, with the enemy's help, start to condemn ourselves. But God's Word tells us that Christ overcame for us (Romans. 6:6, Galatians. 2:20-21). Let us not nullify the grace of God by trying to be perfected by the flesh (Galatians. 3:3).

II. THERE IS NOW NO CONDEMNATION

Each step of the way in our walk with God requires faith. We need to be believers by faith in what the Word tells us. Romans 8:1 reads, "There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus." We are seeing this from God's view and not our own. You know that God sees us quite differently than we see ourselves; He sees us as being perfect through the blood of Christ. We see ourselves, as we would be without the blood. This is the problem. If we have condemnation on us, it is either that we are not in Christ Jesus or that we condemn ourselves.

Why is there now no condemnation? Condemnation means to be guilty of wrongdoing. Romans.3:23 tells us that all have sinned, but that God did something about that. He sent His Son to shed His blood that we could pass from death unto life; for there is now no judgment for those in Christ Jesus. "Who will bring a charge against God's elect? God is the one who justifies, who is the one who condemns" (Romans 8:33, 14:22)? We condemn ourselves! It's ours by choice. The truth is that we are saying to ourselves, "God has not forgiven me, and I will have to do better to earn a clear conscience," therefore nullifying God's grace. That brings us to salvation by works.

We need to be reminded here that it is the sin of the flesh waging war that wants to bring condemnation on us. So where does this leave us? First, we need to be renewed in our minds to the fact that Christ died for our sins once and for all. He paid the debt! Secondly, we died with Him leaving the old nature behind, (1Peter 4:1-2) taking on a new nature which is controlled by the Holy Spirit--that He, working in us, will deliver us out of bondage into a walk of freedom and liberty. "Beloved, if our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence before God" (1John 3:21). Keep in mind this applies only to persons being led of the Holy Spirit.

III. WALKING IN THE SPIRIT

In Romans 8:5 we read, "For those who are according to the flesh set their minds on things of the flesh." The statement has been made many times that we are in this world, but we are not of this world, and yet our minds are set on the things of the flesh to a great degree. We spend much of our time concerning ourselves with what other people think of us, trying to impress them with our worldly possessions and knowledge, gathering money, land, and other tangibles. There are those today that believe they can only be great witnesses for God if they have much of the world's goods. God forbid! His Word tells us that our witness is dependent on His Spirit! Now don't get me wrong here, I believe God has a purpose in our lives for such things, but not when they become troublesome, burdensome, or worrisome for us. We need to grow spiritually by ministering to the Lord in praise and thanksgiving; studying the Word; praying in the Spirit; and Christian fellowship as in (Acts 2:41-47). As we seek the Lord first in our lives, God will bless us as our souls prosper (3 John 2).

Let's go back to the beginning when God created Adam from the dust (Genesis. 2:7). The Word tells us here that He took the dust and breathed into it, and the dust became alive. In John 20:22 Jesus breathed on the disciples, and they received the Holy Spirit. Our natural lives and our spiritual lives are the breath of God. The problem we are having is that the natural man wants to come back in as Paul tells us in Galatians. 3, "You foolish Galatians, who has bewitched you? This is the only thing I want to find out from you: did you receive the Spirit by the works of the Law, or by hearing with faith? Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh?" How often do we fall into this ourselves? May the Lord help us to see ourselves as we are! In Rom. 8:9 God tells us we are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in us. But if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Him. A reminder here is that we need to believe and confess what God's Word says. We are in the Spirit, if the Spirit of God dwells in us. How do we know He does? Rom. 8:16 tells us the Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are the children of God.

God has promised us in His Word victory over the flesh (Galatians 5:16), "Walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desires of the flesh." It was for freedom that Christ set us free, therefore keep standing firm and do not be subject to a yoke of slavery" (Galatians. 5:1). "We have the mind of Christ" (1Corinthians 2:16). God has done His part in that He paid for our sin so there is no judgment, no guilt, and no condemnation. God gives us a new spiritual life when we choose to die to the old nature which is SELF. God also gives us a new mind, the mind of Christ. However, we have to believe that what His Word tells us is true. By faith we receive and allow His Spirit to work in us to His satisfaction, believing that this is what He will do. We need to check ourselves to see that we are being renewed by the change in attitudes and by overcoming the desires of the flesh. There is a great tendency for us to try to be overcomers in ourselves.

IV. OVERCOMING THE GUILT OF SIN

It is also necessary to have knowledge of where we stand with God in reference to sin. Many people believe that we sin continually and need to be before God repenting often. But let's look at His Word.

1Jn. 3:6 says, "No one who abides in Him sins; no one who sins has seen Him or knows Him." Verse 9, "No one who is born of God sins, because His seed abides in Him; and he cannot sin; because he is born of God." God's Word is quite explicit here, and yet there is controversy over this scripture and that of 1John 1:8-9: "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness." Are they in conflict? I believe not. Let us take a closer look. 1John 1:8-9 deals mainly with salvation [read verses 1-10] while verses in 1Jn 3:1-10 have to do with the soul not sinning against God. **See Mk 3:28**. The key to 1John 3:6 are the words "abides in Him," indicating that the sin-free person is one who dwells in union with God. 1John 3:9 then compliments and completes this idea by saying of the sin-free person, that, "His seed (God's seed) abides in him." Thus, the sin-free person [his soul], is one who has God's seed of new life in him through being "born of God" (born again), and who now lives in union with God. We must walk in the Spirit, for as we stay in the Spirit, we cannot sin against God! The Holy Spirit will keep us from sin. We are told in 1Th. 5:19, "The will of God for us is not to quench the Spirit." Do you see why? We are also shown this in the parable of the Ten Virgins.

Five were wise, and five were foolish. The foolish, not maintaining a full supply of oil, ran out; thus they did not enter into the marriage feast (Matthew 25:1-11). The oil is symbolic of the Holy Spirit. As the Spirit abides in us, He is able to keep us from sin. We may need to go a little further here for some, so look at Luke 10:42. Jesus tells Martha that there are only a few things necessary – really only one – that we have a close personal relationship with the Savior (see also John 3:16). Everything else that we do, say and believe hinges on this acceptance of Jesus. In Mark 3:28-29 the Word reads, "Truly I say to you all sins shall be forgiven the sons of men and whatever blasphemies they utter; but whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit never has forgiveness, but is guilty of an eternal sin." The key word here is "blaspheme." The dictionary tells us to blaspheme means to "speak about with abuse or contempt." The word "contempt" in a legal term, as in Mark 3:28, means to be in disobedience or open disrespect for rules or decisions of the lawmaking body. [The lawmaker in the Bible is God.] We see here that God shall forgive all the sins of men except the blasphemy of the Holy Spirit. I believe the word "rejection" is more understandable here, for as a person is in disobedience to the Holy Spirit's calling [for the Holy Spirit calls us to Christ], he rejects God's only plan for salvation, and we know by the Word that that person cannot be saved. Therefore there is only one sin that separates us from God and that is the rejection of the Holy Spirit's calling.

Going back to 1John 1:8-9, God's Word tells us that if we say we have no sin (the key word here is "we"), we are deceiving ourselves. We do not have the right to say we have not sinned (Romans 3:23). We have all sinned and come short of the Glory of God. This is a salvation issue, see vs 2. 1Peter 4:1-2 will clear this up for us. "Because he who has suffered death in the flesh has ceased from sin; so as to live the rest of the time in the flesh no longer for the lust of men, but for the will of God." Remember our flesh, Paul says, will serve the law of sin (Romans 7:25); but we are of the Spirit (Romans 8:9). We have been crucified with Christ (Galatians 2:20)! We now can understand an attitude of repentance, one, which turns us from the desire of sin to the desire of being pleasing to God. Knowing that God looks at the heart, and His Word said He gave us a new heart and spirit (Ezekiel 36:26-27); we rest in the fact that the Holy Spirit will guide and lead us to repentance. Do you see now that as we receive Christ by the Holy Spirit, we are made holy before God, actually without sin, by His blood, as if we had never sinned?

Knowing that repentance is a change of desire, we can now draw the conclusion that by walking in the Spirit, God will keep us holy. If we get caught up in the things of the flesh, His Spirit will convict us, and God is faithful to forgive us.

V. ON TO LIBERTY

Paul's message to us in the New Testament is this; "Christ set us free to be free men." Throughout the New Testament we see this message being brought out not only by Paul but by Jesus himself (John 8:36). God uses the liberty that He has given to us to see how we are going to respond to His commands.

I believe we do the same thing with our children when we tell them what is required of them and then allow them an opportunity to walk freely before us, encouraging and disciplining as we see the need arise. For without the ability to choose freely, we remain slaves instead of sons; we live in fear rather than love.

Paul writes in 1Corinthians 6:12 that "All things are lawful for me, but all things are not profitable; all things are lawful for me, but I will not be brought under the power of anything." Again, in 1Corinthians 10:23, "All things are lawful for me, but all things are not profitable; all things are lawful for me, but all things edify not." Some believe that these two statements refer only to meat, but the wording here is "all things." Now some may say that this gives us a license to sin; may it never be! Rather that we would seek to find the things that are profitable, edifying, and free from bondage, without the fear of being cut off.

Let me say here that by the blood of Jesus, God has opened to us the right to choose freely and to learn by our mistakes, without the loss of salvation or a separation from God, knowing that we will not be able to go on making the wrong choices. We will learn to desire the things that are pleasing to God because we love Him and also for our own well-being. We serve God because we choose to, not through force. Can you see here how imperative it is that liberty exists, where by God and we may see our hearts? Now some may say this is very dangerous ground, that we are unable to choose properly, but remember this is only for the Spirit-filled Christian who has a new heart, a

new spirit, a new mind--the mind of Christ. God is willing now when He proclaims, "I will give you the desires of your heart," because He has given us a new heart, which is in unity or can be brought into unity with His.

Paul cautions us in Galatians 5:13, "For you were called to freedom, brethren; only do not turn your freedom into an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another." We are not only required by the Word to walk in freedom, but also to discipline ourselves, through the leading of the Holy Spirit, so that we do not abuse our freedom. Living in the USA we can see this clearly, while having freedom and the opportunity to do the wrong thing, with minimal reprimands or none at all, we have to discipline ourselves out of concern for others. "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you."

1John. 4:18 reads, "There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves punishment and the one who fears is not perfected in love." Let us walk before God in love, knowing He loves us and will keep us as long as we desire to be kept. He is not going to punish us for our errors, but is willing to forgive us as we turn away. He will lead us to things that please Him and give us the ability through the Holy Spirit to walk perfectly before Him in love. The Word does teach us, however, that we will reap what we sow. We see it is very important that we learn what is pleasing to God and to move in that direction, keeping ourselves from going through heartache, that could be avoided, by listening to the voice of God, instead of our flesh.

By walking in the permissive will of God, we find hard knocks, but in the perfect will of God--love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control, against such things there is no law. We are exhorted by the Word to test ourselves to see if we are in the faith and to examine ourselves. "Or do you not recognize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you--unless indeed you fail the test" (2Corinthians 13:5)!

Now we can say, "IN JESUS CHRIST VICTORY SHALL BE MINE!" Amen

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