

Perfecting Holiness in the Fear of God

Can Sin be Overcome?

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"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." II Corinthians 7: 1.

"Perfecting holiness;" Is that possible? Can mortal man arrive at such a state? Is it possible to live above sin? Can we overcome on a daily basis until we may finally arrive at the point of perfect holiness? It certainly appears that even the best of saints fall from time to time. After all, haven't we been told from our youth that only Jesus is perfect?

The purpose of this booklet is to examine the concept of perfecting holiness. If the reader hungers and thirsts after righteousness, he may find within these pages some very encouraging thoughts and promises—not those of the author, but those "exceeding great and precious promises" that come down from the Father above and recorded in His holy Word.

A State of Mind

A young man watched with awe as the big elephant was put to work by the circus workers hoisting the large 3-ring tent. With tremendous power, the pachyderm pulled the rope of the block and tackle, raising the heavy canvas to the top of the main pole. After the tent was up, the curious onlooker followed the elephant and his trainer to the rear of the tent where he would be stalled for the night. Leading the elephant into the center of a small ring encircled by a short 4-inch curb, the trainer fastened a thin chain to one of the massive hind ankles, and then walked away.

Astounded, the young man approached the trainer and inquired how it was possible that such a short curb and a tiny chain could hold the powerful animal. What kept him from snapping the chain with minimal effort and stepping across the curb into freedom?

The trainer chuckled and responded, "Why, that is simple! When he was just a baby I bound his ankle with that chain and tethered him inside that curb. He would pull and tug on that chain until he tired of trying. Day after day his efforts to break free diminished as he became convinced that he couldn't escape. He finally stopped trying, accepting the fact that he was restricted to the confines of the curbed area. Today he is more than capable of bursting every link of the chain, but he is convinced that he can't, so he doesn't try."

Is it possible that Satan has us convinced that we cannot escape the chains of sin? Are we settled on the fact that we are confined to the ring of unrighteousness so long as we are in this mortal flesh? Think about it—no one would ever overcome if they had it fixed in their minds that they couldn't. Then when enough people are convinced that it cannot be done, a maxim is created and perpetuated, i.e., "No one can be perfect." Or, "We're going to continue to sin until Jesus comes." Let's examine these concepts from a truly biblical perspective. Are we to overcome sin in this life, or aren't we? Are we to be perfect or settle for something less than perfect? Like the elephant, just maybe we have the potential and the power to break free, but have never realized it.

These Promises

Let's consider again the opening text. "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." II Corinthians 7:1.

As one reads this passage, the question probably arises as to what promises the apostle was speaking of. We can find the answer by referring to the closing verses of the previous chapter. After admonishing the believers not to be unequally yoked with unbelievers, Paul explains, " .. for ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you, and will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the LORD Almighty." II Corinthians 6:16-18.

These, then, are the promises upon which we are to "cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit," and to perfect "holiness in the fear of God."

- We are His temple
- He will dwell in us
- He will walk in us (work, perform, etc.)
- He will be our God
- We will be His people
- He will receive us
- He will be a Father unto us
- We will be His sons and daughters

With such wonderful promises as these, who can fail to see the potential of all believers? Holiness is within grasp, because He who possesses holiness has pledged to abide and work in us. And this abiding and working is not in some cold and calculated way, but as a Father to His children. Love is to be the basis of the relationship. The more the quantity and quality of Christ's love toward us is realized, the more we will be filled with His presence and power.

"That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; And to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fullness of God." Ephesians 3:17-19.

What a wonderful thought! Yes, but it is more than a thought. It is God's word and pledge to us. This is truly what God's desire is for each of His children. He longs to fill us with His fullness, bringing us into a state of perfect holiness and righteousness.

From Wicked to Righteous

E. J. Waggoner once made this wonderful observation:

"There is one text, however, which briefly sums up all that Christ is to man, and gives the comprehensive reason for considering Him. It is this: 'But of Him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption.' I Corinthians 1:30. We are ignorant, wicked, lost; Christ is to us wisdom, righteousness, redemption. What a range! From ignorance and sin to righteousness and redemption."! ¹

"For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God." Romans 3:23.

It is quite clear that all have sinned. No one is free from some stain on his character until that stain is removed by the blood of Christ. In spite of our best efforts, "we are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags." Isaiah 64:6. We can all conclude that only Jesus lived a completely sinless life—there is no argument. The real question is whether a believer, washed in the blood of Christ, is able to live a life of perfect holiness. This question cannot be answered by your experience, the present writer's experience, or even the experience of the godliest people we know. The answer can only be found in God's Word.

All the Days of Our Life

In Luke, chapter one, is recorded the words of Zechariah after the birth of his son, John the Baptist, while filled with the Holy Ghost. Listen to his prophecy;

"And his father Zechariah was filled with the Holy Ghost, and prophesied saying, Blessed be the Lord God of Israel; for he hath visited and redeemed his people, and hath raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David; as he spake by the mouth of his holy prophets, which have been since the world began; that we should be saved from our enemies, and from the hand of all that hate us; to perform the mercy promised to our fathers, and to remember his holy covenant; the oath which he swore to our father Abraham, that he would grant unto us, that we, being delivered out of the hand of our enemies, might serve him without fear, in holiness and righteousness before him, all the days of our life." Luke 1:67-75.

Under inspiration of the Spirit of God, Zechariah declares that we might serve the Lord in holiness and righteousness. Occasionally? No, but "all the days of our lives." Again we ask, is that possible? Let's continue.

"But as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation; Because it is written, Be ye holy; for I am holy." I Peter 1: 15, 16.

"Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father in heaven is perfect." Matthew 5:48.

And again, "And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as He is pure." I John 3:3.

Is this merely an unattainable, distant goal that we are futilely to strive for? Are we admonished to live above and beyond our highest potential? Or is it possible that we may, in the power of Christ and the Holy Spirit, live victoriously over sin? Could it be that we have staggered in unbelief, not realizing what God has provided for our complete sanctification and deliverance from sin?

It was declared to Joseph by the angel,

"... thou shalt call his name JESUS [Saviour]: for he shall save his people from their sins." Matthew 1:21.

This is just the Saviour we need—One who is able to save us from our sins. This requires more than a transaction that takes place in the record books of heaven. It is evident that the power of sin must be broken and that we may be set free from its bondage. This is precisely what we are told in Paul's epistle to the Romans.

"Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin ... For sin shall not have dominion over you." Romans 6:6, 14.

We should not serve sin! Sin should not have dominion (lordship) over us! Where do we find the resources to escape this servitude? If we see in the life and death of Jesus only a substitution whereby we are justified, we may find some motivation to live more in accordance with the will of God than we did before, but we will lack the necessary strength to live victoriously. In addition to Christ being our substitute, we must find in Him our example and our power. It is of absolute necessity that we pass from sin's dominion to the lordship of Jesus. Paul spoke of this when he wrote,

"Giving thanks unto the Father ... Who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of His dear Son." Colossians 1:13.

We will continue to fall into sin unless we are abiding in Christ and He in us. It is by His residence in our lives, our bodies, that we find victory over sin.

"What? Know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own." I Corinthians 6:19.

"Jesus answered and said unto him, If a man love me, he will keep my words: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him." John 14:23.

Paul spoke often of this great mystery.

"Even the mystery which hath been hid from ages and from generations, but now is made manifest to his saints: To whom God would make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles; which is Christ in you, the hope of glory." Colossians 1:27.

The Flesh and Spirit

Now, we may inquire just what it is that Jesus is able to do in our bodies. The promise is that He is able and willing to do in our flesh precisely what He did in His own flesh—overcome sin. What a glorious thought! Can this thought be true? Yes, brethren, it is affirmed by the Word of God. Listen:

"There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death. For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh: That the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit." Romans 8:1-4.

What a wonderful truth! Jesus overcame and condemned sin in the flesh. What kind of flesh? Why, none other than the likeness of sinful flesh! The same type of flesh that we are all accustomed to—the fallen nature of all mankind. Many do not want to accept this wonderful fact, this mystery. But what saith the Scriptures? "In the likeness of sinful flesh." We find in Hebrews the following confirmation:

"For both he that sanctifieth and they who are sanctified are all of one [flesh]: for which cause he is not ashamed to call them brethren ... Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same; that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil . . . For verily he took not on him the nature of angels; but he took on him the seed of Abraham. Wherefore in all things it behoved him to be made like unto his brethren." Hebrews 2:11, 14, 16, 17.

Let us no longer say that we are bound to sin. To do so is to deny what Jesus has promised to do in us. True, we have an advocate with the Father in the event that we do sin (I John 2:1). Praise the Lord for His provision of repentance and forgiveness, but the provision is also available to keep us from sinning;

and such a provision is what God requires that we lay hold of by faith, that we may "cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God." II Corinthians 7: 1.

The writer of Hebrews, under inspiration of the Spirit, swept away every excuse of human devising for continuing in sin. God knew the evil that resides in the hearts of men and women in all ages, and thus had to make provision for all circumstances and all doubts. With the earthly life of Jesus, every temptation common to man was met and defeated. This could only be done if Christ came with the fallen nature of man. He accepted humanity in its fallen condition, thus providing a ladder from earth to heaven, the bottom rung reaching man just where he is. Note the following verse:

"For we have not a high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin." Hebrews 4:15.

Jesus faced everything that Satan could throw at Him and overcame at every point. He "condemned sin in the flesh." The good news is that no one will ever have to endure all that Jesus did. None of us will ever feel the weight and power of Satan's devices like the Son of man had to do. Further, because Jesus was tempted in all points, He is able to feel our infirmities and trials, and thus offer heartfelt, love-inspired aid.

"For in that He Himself hath suffered being tempted, He is able to succor them that are tempted." Hebrews 2:18.

Our Way of Escape

There is yet another marvelous promise, straight from God's throne, to every believer. Here it is:

"There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man; but God is faithful, Who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it." I Corinthians 10:13.

So what is the way of escape?

Do you remember the story of the exodus from Egypt? The children of Israel were trapped at the Red Sea—swelling waters in front of them, mountains on either side, and Pharaoh's army approaching from behind. Humanly speaking, there was no way out. But God had prepared a way of escape. All that was required was an act of faith—faith in God's delivering power—and they experienced an awesome miracle. Moses trusted in God and said unto the people:

"Fear ye not, stand still, and see the salvation of the Lord ... The Lord will fight for you ... And Moses stretched out his hand over the sea; and the Lord caused the sea to go back by a strong east wind all that night, and made the sea dry land, and the waters were divided." Exodus 14: 13, 14, 21.

Not only were they delivered, but when there was no food, manna fell from heaven. When there was no water, springs gushed out of the rock. Christ was the deliverer and provider in every case, as it is written:

"Moreover, brethren, I would not that ye should be ignorant, how that all our fathers were under the cloud, and all passed through the sea; And were all baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea; And did all eat the same spiritual meat; And did all drink the same spiritual drink: for they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them: and that Rock was Christ." I Corinthians 10:1-4.

Jesus desired the Jews to understand this truth when He spoke to them face to face.

"Verily, verily, I say unto you, Moses gave you not that bread from heaven; but My Father giveth you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is He which cometh down from heaven, and giveth light unto the world."

He also wants us to understand this truth today.

"He that eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, dwelleth in me, and I in him." John 6:32-33, 56.

Again we see the promise whereby we are to perfect holiness—"I will dwell in them." And again we see the mystery--"Christ in you, the hope of glory."

So, Jesus is our way of escape. The more we assimilate His character, the more strength we find to quench the temptations and fiery darts of the wicked. Trusting in Him, we will often experience a "strong east wind" to deliver us from the power of the enemy. As Christ abides in our hearts we begin to walk after the Spirit and not after the flesh; and this is precisely how the righteousness of the law is fulfilled in us (Rom. 8:4). The direction that the Spirit walks in is always righteousness and away from iniquity. Thus we see the fulfillment of a wonderful promise recorded in Acts 3:26. The occasion was Peter preaching to the Jews after he and John healed the lame man at the temple gate called Beautiful. The story closes with Peter declaring, "Unto you first God, having raised up His Son Jesus, sent Him to bless you, **in turning away everyone of you from his iniquities.**" Christ is our Beautiful Gate to wholeness and holiness. Not only is He the gate, but also the way, the truth and the life (John 14:6).

When this is understood rightly, it becomes clear that no man is justified nor sanctified by the law. Christ is both the Justifier and the Sanctifier. We are saved by grace through faith (Ephesians 2:8-9). Does this mean that the law is done away with? Far from it! Paul answers that question in Romans 3:31. "Do we then make void the law through faith? God forbid: yea, we establish the law."

The word 'establish' comes from a Greek word meaning, "to cause to stand."² It is Jesus himself who establishes the law, or causes the law to stand, by fulfilling the new covenant promise in us.

"This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, saith the Lord; I will put my laws into their hearts, and in their minds will I write them; and their sins and iniquities will I remember no more." Hebrews 10: 16-17.

What Are We Saved From?

The way the Gospel is often preached today is a travesty.

Many do not know what Jesus came to save them from. The charismatic movement teaches that Jesus saves us from all the symptoms of sin, i.e. sickness, poverty, etc., but rarely come to grips with sin itself. The blessings they desire are more material than anything else. Many churches call people to the altar to be saved, but never explain what they are to be saved from. Such was not the case in the days of the Apostles. When people heard the Gospel, they knew that they were being called to repent of sin—and they understood what sin was.

"Whosoever committeth sin transgresseth also the law: for sin is the transgression of the law." I John 3:4.

"I had not known sin, but by the law: for I had not known lust, except the law had said, Thou shalt not covet." Romans 7:7.

It was understood that the Ten Commandments constituted God's moral code for life. This is not merely the letter of the law, but the spirit of it. Jesus was to "magnify the law and make it honorable." Isaiah 42:21.

He taught that to hate was to kill, to look lustfully at a woman was to commit adultery. Every sin that can be committed, either in thought or in action, can be traced back to a violation of one or more of the commandments; therefore the Gospel is designed to bring us into harmony with the law—that "the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us" (Romans 8:4) by the presence and power of Christ in our lives.

Let's return to I John 3:4 for a moment, where we found the Bible definition for sin.

"For whosoever committeth sin transgresseth also the law: for sin is the transgression of the law."

The next two verses explain what Jesus came to do in our lives. Read closely:

"And ye know that He was manifested to take away our sins; and in Him is no sin. Whosoever abideth in Him sinneth not: whosoever sinneth hath not seen Him, neither known Him."

According to John, the whole key is abiding in Christ. If we abide in Him and He in us, we will cease from sin, cease from transgressing God's law. We will be turned from our iniquities to live a life of righteousness. This is the fulfillment of the prophecy given by the angel to Joseph before the birth of Jesus.

"And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name JESUS: for he shall save his people from their sins." Matthew 1:21.

Is this to be an occasional experience? Although it may be for some, God did not design it to be so. He has made provision for this righteousness to be "all the days of our life" (Luke 1:75).

Dead to Sin

If we are abiding in Christ, we are dead to sin.

"Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin. For he that is dead is freed from sin ... Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord." Romans 6:6, 7, 11.

Again, the key is abiding in Christ, and He in us.

Charles Fitch, a 19th century preacher, commented thus on the above passage:

"Reckon yourselves to be dead unto sin, by trusting in Christ to keep you thus alive. It may perhaps be said, that a person may reckon himself dead to sin, who has once repented, though he now continues to sin every day. But if I should find a man every day intoxicated, I should not regard him as dead to that sin, whatever he might say respecting past repentance—and the same is true of every other sin in thought, word, or deed. No man is dead to sin who commits sin—and as Christ who died once, dies no more, so he who is dead to sin sins no more. If he falls into sin, he is no longer dead to sin."³

If we choose to sin, we verily resurrect the old man and can no longer say that we are dead to sin. We must take seriously the admonition in Hebrews 3:12. "Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God."

Continual surrender to Christ is the one and only means whereby we may stay free from sin. But we should not think that this close connection to Christ, this abiding in Him, is an elusive thing. He is not a slippery bar of soap. His cleansing blood, Word, and power are always there to hold. And the holding is not ours alone, for He will hold us.

"Behold, I have engraven thee upon the palms of my hands." Isaiah 49: 6.

"I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee." Hebrews 13:5.

The departure that often takes place is not Him from us, but us from Him. We cannot allow our best affections to be placed upon anyone or anything other than our Savior.

"Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life." Proverbs 4:23.

Perfection

In the book of Hebrews, the author uses the word perfect (or some form of it) eleven times. The Greek words generally mean "complete, brought to a full end, perfect." At times the word is applied to Christ, at times the covenant, at times the sanctuary, and finally to the believers. The overriding theme is the work of Christ, as our faithful and perfect High Priest, bringing the believers to perfection.

"For the law having a shadow of good things to come, and not the very image of the things, can never with those sacrifices which they offered year by year continually make the comers thereunto perfect." Hebrews 10:1.

The Levitical priesthood was imperfect, the sacrifices were imperfect, the ministry in the earthly sanctuary was imperfect, and thus the people were left imperfect. Under the new covenant we have a perfect High Priest, a perfect sacrifice, a perfect ministry in the heavenly sanctuary, thus making it possible for the perfection of the believers.

One writer said it this way:

"[Hebrews 10: 1-4 quoted] This again shows that though perfection was the aim in all the ministry that was performed under the law, yet perfection was not attained by any of those performances. They were all simply figures for the time then present of the ministry and priesthood by which perfection is attained; that is the ministry and priesthood of Christ. Those sacrifices could not make the comers thereunto perfect. The true sacrifice and the true ministry in 'the sanctuary and the true tabernacle' do make the comers thereunto perfect: and this perfection consists in the worshipers having 'no more conscience of sins'."⁴

What does it mean to have no more conscience of sins? First, it means to have full assurance that your past sins are forgiven. This much most all will agree upon. But the writer of Hebrews continues driving forward to the perfection of the believer's life.

"For if the blood of bulls and of goats, and the ashes of an heifer sprinkling the unclean, sanctifieth to the purifying of the flesh: How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?" Hebrews 9: 13, 14.

"What are dead works? Death itself is the consequence of sin. Dead works therefore are works that have sin in them. Then the purging of the conscience from dead works is the so entirely cleansing of the soul from sin, by the blood of Christ, through the eternal Spirit, that in the life and works of the believer in Jesus, sin shall have no place; the works shall be only works of

faith, and the life shall be only the life of faith, and so be only the pure 'service of the living God' ."⁵

Sanctification

We also find in Hebrews the theme of sanctification. The word sanctify is defined as "to set in a state opposed to the common or unclean, or to deliver from such a state and put into a state corresponding to the nature of God."?⁶

Watch closely the development of thought in the tenth chapter of Hebrews, starting with verse 5 and running through verse 10.

"Wherefore when He cometh into the world, He saith, Sacrifice and offering Thou wouldst not, but a body hast Thou prepared me: in burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin Thou hast had no pleasure. Then said I, Lo, I come (in the volume of the book it is written of Me) to do Thy will, O God. Above when He said, Sacrifice and offering and burnt offerings and offering for sin Thou wouldst not, neither hadst pleasure therein; which are offered by the law; Then said He, Lo, I come to do Thy will, O God. He taketh away the first, that He may establish the second." (verses 4-9)

The first was the sacrifices and offerings. The second was the will of God. What is the will of God?

"For this is the will of God, even your sanctification." I Thessalonians 4:3.

Now we are ready for verse 10 of Hebrews 10. "By the which will we are sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all." So then, Christ established the "second ... the will of God ... by the which will we are sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus." He took away the types and shadows that He could bring in the real sacrifice that would lead to our sanctification. The purging of our conscience is a result of the heartfelt appreciation of the ultimate sacrifice in our behalf. Love begets love! "We love Him, because He first loved us." Obedience springs from love. "For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments: and His commandments are not grievous." I John 5:3. This obedience is a sign of our sanctification—being put into a state corresponding to the nature of God. "And we have known and believed the love that God hath to us. God is love; and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him. Herein is our love made perfect, that we may have boldness in the day of judgment; because as He is, so are we in this world." I John 4:19, 5:3, 4:16-17. Let us go on unto perfection, brethren. Let us not be held by a short curb and a tiny chain, as was the elephant at the beginning of this book. Let us set aside every weight and sin, running the race, "perfecting holiness in the fear of God."

In the Fear of God

The fear of God is a key element in our striving against sin. Without the fear of God, one is left in a state of weakness, ignorance and carnality. With the fear of God, one receives strength, wisdom and spirituality. Let's note a few texts regarding the reverential fear of the Lord. The first one we shall consider is found in Exodus 18:21.

Jethro, the father-in-law of Moses, observed that Moses was going to wear himself out by trying to judge all the cases of dispute among the people. He offers this advice:

"Moreover thou shalt provide out of all the people able men, such as fear God, men of truth, hating covetousness; and place such over them, to be rulers of thousands, and rulers of hundreds, rulers of fifties, and rulers of tens."

The fear of God brought wonderful qualities of character to these men. They were 1) able men, 2) men of truth, 3) haters of covetousness, 4) wise enough to judge, and 5) strong enough to rule.

"The angel of the LORD encampeth round about them that fear him, and delivereth them."
Psalm 34:7.

What does the Lord want to deliver us from more than anything else? Why, the power of sin, of course. That was the whole purpose of sending his Son to die for us.

"O fear the LORD, ye his saints: for there is no want to them that fear him." Psalm 34:9.

That simply means we will not lack anything that is necessary for life and holiness if we have true reverential fear of the Lord in our hearts.

"The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom." Psalm 111: 10.

If that is where wisdom begins, then it follows that those who do not fear the Lord are void of true wisdom. They may be worldly wise, but wholly ignorant of that wisdom which comes from above.

"He will fulfill the desire of them that fear him: he also will hear their cry, and will save them."
Psalm 145: 19.

Is your desire to live righteously? Have you ever cried out to the Lord to deliver you from sin and the many temptations that the enemy of souls may bring to you? If you truly fear the Lord, the promise is that he will save you and give you the desires of your heart. Here is where honest self-examination is a must. What are your real desires? If it is generally for material blessings, perhaps you need to read again our first text in this section on the fear of God, Exodus 18:21.

"Be not wise in thine own eyes: fear the LORD, and depart from evil." "The fear of the LORD is to depart from evil." Proverbs 3:7, 8:13.

Many today do not possess an appropriate fear of the Lord. Often we speak of reverential fear, comparing it to the fear that a child has for his parents. Where this is true in a sense, it falls desperately short of describing the fear of the Lord as expressed in the Bible. Few children ever "*exceedingly fear and quake*" before their parents as did Moses before the Lord (Hebrews 12:21). The Scriptures portray our heavenly Father as an awesome God, full of glory and majesty, executing both mercy and justice. The clearer we see Him, the greater both our fear and love for Him will become. The natural result is a departure from evil and a hungering for purity and holiness.

"And wisdom and knowledge shall be the stability of thy times, and strength of salvation: the fear of the Lord is his treasure." Isaiah 33:6.

It is clear to see why the fear of the Lord should be our treasure, for it brings wisdom, knowledge, stability, strength and salvation. He who possesses these has something richer and more enduring than all the gold and silver this world can afford.

"Fear God, and give glory to him; for the hour of his judgment is come." Revelation 14:7.

Everything else pales into insignificance when we consider this judgment. Eternity hangs in the balance. This is why the admonition is given to fear God; and this fear is the first declaration given in context of the everlasting gospel spoken of in the 6th verse.

Countless passages could yet be sighted dealing with the fear of the Lord, but we shall consider just one more. Ecclesiastes 12: 13-14 dovetails with the judgment hour message of our last text.

"Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man. For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil."

God desires obedience from His children. When the fear of the Lord and the love of the Lord are blended, the result is a maturity in Christ—the fullness of Christ.

The Stature of the Fullness of Christ

"Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ." Ephesians 4:13.

What a glorious thought! God has designed that we should reach the full stature of Christ. It would be absurd to believe that such a stature would include any stain of sin. This stature is the divine nature—a nature that recoils from even the thought of sin. Has God provided us with the means to attain such a nature? Listen to Peter:

"According as His divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him that hath called us to glory and virtue: Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust." II Peter 1:3, 4.

"Every provision has been made that we may attain a height of stature in Christ Jesus that will meet the divine standard. God is not pleased with His representatives if they are content to be dwarfs when they might grow up to the full stature of men and women in Christ. He wants you to have height and breadth in Christian experience. He wants you to have great thoughts, noble aspirations, clear perceptions of truth, and lofty purposes of action. Every passing year should increase the soul's yearning for purity and perfection of Christian character. And if this knowledge increases day by day, month by month, year by year, it will not be work consumed as hay, wood, and stubble; but it will be laying on the foundation stone, gold, silver, and precious stones-works that are not perishable, but which will stand the fires of the last day."⁷

Why do we fail to see such a unity of the faith on this subject of overcoming sin? There are a number of reasons, but let's go back to Ephesians 4 to see if we can pinpoint a major cause for this failure of unity. Paul tells us that some gifts were given to the Church in order to bring us to the unity of the faith and full stature of Christ. These gifts were in the form of men in various positions of responsibility.

"And He gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ." Ephesians 4:13.

Did the apostles teach that we can and must overcome sin? Yes, they most certainly did. Did the prophets teach that we can and must overcome sin? Yes, they most certainly did. Did the evangelists in the Bible teach overcoming sin? They certainly must have. Do the evangelists, pastors and teachers today teach that we can and must overcome sin? Oops! Here we run into problems, don't we? If the evangelists, pastors and teachers that God gives to the Church are for the perfecting of the saints, for the purpose of bringing us into the unity of the faith unto a perfect man, and unto the full stature of Christ, then it only stands to reason that those who teach otherwise are not from God. Those who

teach that we may continue to sin and that we need not overcome are false evangelists, pastors and teachers.

The Church today is full of those who are gifted at providing a salve for the guilty conscience, but fail to provide true provender for the flock. Sadly, in most congregations, the flock only wants the rich dainties that are set before them, having no appetite for the real Bread of Life. The bottom line is this:

"Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled." Matthew 5:6.

That is a promise you can rely on! If you truly seek righteousness and desire to reach the full stature of Christ Jesus, He will perform that work of righteousness and sanctification in you. You shall be filled! If you do not hunger and thirst for such a life, you will not attain it. Pray for that appetite if you do not have such now, and cultivate a taste for nutritious spiritual food.

"O taste and see that the LORD is good: blessed is the man that trusteth in Him." Psalm 34:8.

Seek the Lord and behold Him, for by beholding Him, you can become like Him.

"But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord." II Corinthians 3:18.

To Him That Overcometh

Jesus sent a message to each of the seven churches in Revelation 2 and 3. There was one overriding theme in each message; overcoming.

To Ephesus He said (2:7), "To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God."

Remember, He could not allow Adam and Eve to continue eating from the tree of life after their fall, for that would have perpetuated sin. Only those who overcome sin can be granted access to the tree of life.

To Smyrna He said (2:11), "He that overcometh shall not be hurt of the second death. "

To Pergamos He said (2:17), "To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the hidden manna, and will give him a white stone, and in the stone a new name written, which no man knoweth saving he that receiveth it."

To Thyatira He said (2:26-28), "And he that overcometh, and keepeth my works unto the end, to him will I give power over the nations: And he shall rule them with a rod of iron; as the vessels of a potter shall they be broken to shivers: even as I received of my Father. And I will give him the morning star."

To Sardis He said (3:5), "He that overcometh, the same shall be clothed in white raiment; and I will not blot out his name out of the book of life, but I will confess his name before my Father; and before His angels."

To Philadelphia He said (3: 12), "Him that overcometh will I make a pillar in the temple of my God, and he shall go no more out: and I will write upon him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, which is new Jerusalem, which cometh down out of heaven from my God: and I will write upon him my new name."

To Laodicea He said (3:21), "To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in His throne."

Overcoming is accomplished by faith.

Perfecting Holiness

"For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world: and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith. " I John 5:4.

This is the faith of Jesus. This is the kind of faith the remnant will possess.

"Here is the patience of the saints: here are they that keep the commandments of God, and the faith of Jesus." Revelation 14: 12.

These are so connected to Christ and filled with the fullness of God that they would rather die than sin. You can be among that number if you will fully surrender your life to the blessed Savior, and "press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus," "perfecting holiness in the fear of God." Philippians 3: 14, II Corinthians 7: 1.

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