

The Secret of Victory Over Sin

by L.E. Maxwell

True victory over sin is achieved through reckoning oneself dead to sin through faith in union with Christ.

Scripture: Romans 6:1

Topics: "Identity in Christ", "Victory Over Sin"

Description

L.E. Maxwell emphasizes the struggle many Christians face in achieving true victory over sin, highlighting that while they may be justified, they often remain captives to sin's power. He warns against complacency in spiritual life, urging believers to recognize their union with Christ in His death and resurrection as the key to overcoming sin. Maxwell points out that true victory comes not from self-effort but from understanding and accepting one's identity as dead to sin and alive to God. He encourages believers to reckon themselves dead to sin, emphasizing that this realization is crucial for living a holy life. Ultimately, he calls for a deeper commitment to Christ, moving beyond mere justification to a transformative relationship that leads to true holiness.

Transcript

THESE DAYS OF WAR remind us afresh of the man who reported to his commanding officer, "I have taken a prisoner." His commander said, "Bring him along with you." "He won't come," complained the soldier. "Well, then, come yourself," replied the officer. "I can't. He won't let me," was the final acknowledgment. I fear there is a great deal of Christian victory that is no deeper than that. All Christians have indeed been freed from the penalty of sin. But what about sin's power?

Are we to camp forever around the truth of our justification, that "where sin abounded, grace did much more abound"? Were we justified that we might be legally safe, or that we might become morally and spiritually sound? Were we not declared righteous in Christ that we might be holy in life? Most of God's children seem to have assumed the position that, having been justified, it is quite optional whether or not we live unto ourselves. Our restless and uneasy consciences would often stir us up to heart conviction of our unholiness.

But we have contented ourselves with our judicial standing in Christ. We have misused and abused the blessed truth that "if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous." Perhaps unconsciously to ourselves, we have settled down to an ordinary and defeated Christian life, a customary unholiness. When the Captain of our salvation looks to us to be more than conquerors, to triumph in every place and take captivity captive, we cannot bring our sinful lives into obedience.

"Well, then, come yourself," cries our Captain. But indwelling sinful self "won't let me." Some Christians have been affrighted by the fanatical extremes of perfectionism. Their fears are not without foundation. However, we commend to the reader the wise words of Dr. A. J. Gordon: Divine truth as revealed in Scripture seems often to lie between two extremes. If we regard the doctrine of sinless perfection as a heresy, we regard contentment with sinful imperfection as a greater heresy.

And we gravely fear that many Christians make the apostle's words, "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves," the unconscious justification for a low standard of Christian living. It were almost better for one to overstate the possibilities of sanctification in his eager grasp after holiness, than to understate them in his complacent satisfaction with a traditional unholiness. Certainly it is not an edifying spectacle to see a Christian worldling throwing stones at a Christian perfectionist.

But what saith the Scripture? "Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? God forbid" (Rom. 6:1, 2). Is the reader one of those souls who has discovered that, whereas you thought you had taken a prisoner captive, you find yourself a slave, a veritable victim of self and indwelling sin? You find yourself double-minded and unstable in all your ways? You cry with Paul: "The good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do." You have watched and prayed.

You have struggled and fought, you have, mourned and wept over the futility of your effort to, live for Christ. You may have tried to pray all night, or to "pray through" in order to "get the blessing." How often you have been filled with disgust and shame and secret weeping over your inward wrongness! But in spite of all your agonizing and strivings, you find your resolutions only so many ropes of sand. Self can never cast out self. You are becoming weaker and weaker in your struggle against sin.

Even your faith seems to be fading out. When you "would" take sin a prisoner, bring him along, lock him up, and let him have no liberty, you find that you are actually the captive. Sin and self are in virtual control of the entire sweep of your life. What inward tragedy and conflict and defeat! Oh, the folly and futility of self-effort! But there is a redeeming feature. Faith is often born in despair. To become exceeding sinful in our own eyes may bring us to Paul's heart-rending cry: "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" (Rom. 7:24.)

God is a tower without a stair, And His perfection loves despair. What is the matter? Wherein is our trouble? We have proceeded on the wrong basis. We have missed God's way of victory over sin. James H. McConkey well says: "God lays His foundations deep. Victory over sin He lays in the deeps of death. The Holy Spirit begins His triumphant teaching of the believer's victory over sin by one terse, striking, graphic phrase, 'dead to sin.'" Notice in Romans 6 the Spirit's emphasis on this death to sin: "dead to sin" (v. 2); "died unto sin" (v. 10); "dead indeed unto sin" (v. 11).

In verse 10 we have the truth that Jesus Christ died not only for sins, but that "He died unto sin." When He was "made sin" God exacted of Him sin's penalty to the full. That penalty was death. In death, sin's penalty and power were exhausted. Sin's power, as well as sin's claims, are no more. Hence we read "death hath no more dominion over him." Christ died unto sin. He now lives forever unto God beyond the touch and reach of sin. Paul asks: "Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound?"

God forbid. We who died to sin, how shall we any longer live therein? Or are ye ignorant that all we who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death?" (Rom. 6:1-3, R.V.) Note that Paul does not say we have actually died, neither is he saying we are literally "dead to sin." But Paul is saying that which is true of every believer, namely, that he is dead to sin through his union with Christ. Each and every

believer has been baptized by the Spirit into Christ. "He that is joined unto the Lord is one spirit" one with the Crucified.

When Christ took upon Himself my humanity, apart from which He could never have borne the penalty for my sins, He made me one with Himself. I am identified with Him. He not only died for me, but I died with Him. He took me with Himself into death, and His death was my death to sin. He took me through the Cross, down into the tomb, and out of the tomb on and beyond the reach of sin's dominion. This is the great basic fact. The Holy Ghost says to you and to me: Know ye--know that Christ took your place, fastened you to Himself (Himself being in your very humanity), and took you into death, and through death out into glorious resurrection and emancipation from sin's dominion.

Regardless of our feelings, we are to reckon on this great fact, --of our union with Christ in death and resurrection. "Reckon ye also yourselves to be dead unto sin, but alive unto God in Christ Jesus" (Rom. 6:11, R.V.). Note that Paul does not say, reckon sin dead to you. God's way of victory over sin is not through the suppression of sinful desires, nor through the eradication of the old nature, nor yet through the cleansing of inbred sin. God's way of victory is through crucifixion--deliverance is only through death.

There is a vast difference between reckoning myself dead to sin and reckoning sin dead to me. Every attempt to make sin dead to me, through self-effort, or struggle, or blessing, or make-believe, is not following the scriptural pattern. God says I am to reckon myself dead to sin. If I am willing to be rid of sin, let faith fasten on the fact of my death to sin through my actual life-union with Christ. I am "in Christ." And to be in Him is to be "dead to sin." Oh, to believe it!

Never mind the feelings. Each time I come up against some particular sin, let me there say: I died to that in Christ. If it be a worldly attraction: I am crucified to the world and the world unto me. If it be proud, haughty self, again let me reckon: One died for all, all died. Then I should not, and need not, live unto myself--I am dead to my selfish pride and conceit and haughtiness. Let me do as the two young women who replied to an invitation to attend a ball: "We are very sorry, but it will be impossible for us to attend."

We died last week. We are Christians." They had declared their testimony in baptism the previous week, as dead, buried, risen, and henceforth Christ-ones only. It is said that Emperor William refused request for an audience prepared by a German-American. The Emperor declared that Germans born in Germany but naturalized in America became Americans: "I know Americans; I know Germans; but German-Americans I do not know." Even so, I was once bound in Adam. I am now freed in Christ.

The cross cut me off, killed me outright to the old citizenship and life. I am no Adam-Christ believer. Such a position will get me no audience with my King, bring me no deliverance from bondage to the old man. Let me cease at once any such unholy duplicity. Let me declare that I am Christ's and His alone. Let me yield fully unto Him as one "dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord" (Rom. 6:11).

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