

The Believer's Present Victory

by Lewis Sperry Chafer

The sermon emphasizes that believers can achieve victory in their spiritual lives only through reliance on God's power and faith, despite facing impossible demands and challenges.

Scripture: Romans 8:2, Romans 12:1, Galatians 5:22, Ephesians 4:1, Ephesians 6:13, Ephesians 6:16, Philippians 2:13, Colossians 3:1, 1 Thessalonians 5:16, James 4:7, 1 John 4:4

Topics: "Spiritual Warfare", "Christian Living"

Description

Lewis Sperry Chafer emphasizes the great responsibility that comes with the exalted position of a believer in heaven, requiring a worthy walk in accordance with heavenly standards. He highlights the heavenly demands on the child of God, presenting three distinct bodies of truth in Scripture for different times. Chafer discusses the impossibility of fulfilling these heavenly ideals with human strength, the need to resist the world-ruling foe, Satan, and the internal battle between the fallen human nature and the new nature received through Christ.

Transcript

An exalted position is usually accompanied with great responsibility. This is certainly true, according to Scripture, in the case of the believer in his heavenly position. For when he is seen as a citizen of heaven, and a partaker of those associations, he is also required, both by Scripture and by reason, to "walk worthy of the calling wherewith he is called." The statement of these heavenly demands upon the child of God forms a distinct body of truth, and there are at least three such bodies of truth in Scripture, each appearing as a rule of conduct for some special people in some particular time. The Mosaic Law was given primarily to God's ancient people through Moses; but it has a message still, as it reflects the holiness of God and prepares for the salvation which is in Christ. So the "Sermon on the Mount," with the injunctions of John Baptist, and the early teachings of Christ were given with the coming kingdom age in view and, therefore, form an important revelation in regard to that time when "all shall know the Lord from the least unto the greatest." Though there are some common principles running through all these separate teachings, that Scripture which applies directly to the people of this parenthetical age of the Church will be found only in portions of the Gospels and in the Epistles of the New Testament.

No appreciation of the provisions of God for a victorious life can be had until the demands which the believer's position imposes are realized. These demands are in no way the standards of the world, for the believer is not only a citizen of heaven in position, but is called upon even now to fulfil all the standards of

that sphere. As an illustration of this fact, a very few of these heavenly ideals and injunctions are given here: "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service" (Rom. 12:1). "Rejoice evermore. Pray without ceasing. In everything give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you." "Abstain from all appearance of evil" (I Thes. 5:16-18, 22). "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, long suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance: against such there is no law" (Gal. 5:22, 23). "I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called, with all lowliness and meekness, with long suffering, forbearing one another in love; endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (Eph. 4:1-3). "And grieve not the Holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption" (Eph. 4:30). "Wherefore be ye not unwise, but understanding what the will of the Lord is. And be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be filled with the Spirit; speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord; giving thanks always for all things unto God and the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ" (Eph. 5:17-20). "Wherefore take unto you the whole armor of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand" (Eph. 6:13). "If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Set your affections on things above, not on things on the earth" (Col. 3:1, 2).

These requirements are evidently heavenly in character, and demand nothing less than that which is becoming to that sphere. They are, therefore, beyond human strength; for what human power is able to "give thanks always for all things"? Or to avoid grieving the Holy Spirit? Who can be filled with the Spirit, or rejoice in tribulation? In fact, these demands are often treated as impractical ideals, rather than present requirements; while in reality they are binding on every child of God. To fail in them at any point, will not unsave one (Ps. 130:3; Rom. 4:5); but that failure will profane the heavenly citizenship, dishonor God in whose grace he is standing (Rom. 5:2), and give the enemy occasion to accuse the brethren before God; for Satan judges the Christian on the basis of the heavenly ideals rather than the standards of earth. No one can contemplate these impossible responsibilities without a sense of utter helplessness and insufficiency.

Again, the believer must not only meet the impossible demands of a heavenly position, but he is called upon to face a world-ruling foe, who, with all his kingdom and power, is seeking to break and mar that life into which the Divine nature has been received. The revelation that Satan is going about as a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour, presents a truth that should disarm the believer of all self-confidence and cause him to dread, above all things else, the subtle devices of this foe. In this connection Eph. 6:10-12 may well be restated: "Finally, be strong in the Lord, and in the strength of His might. Put on the whole armor of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For our wrestling is not against flesh and blood, but against the principalities, against the powers, against the world rulers of this darkness, against the spiritual host of wickedness in the heavenlies." In view of this opposition of Satan, it is still more evident that the requirements of the Christian life are beyond any human power.

So, also, there is a fallen human nature within the child of God, which is prone to dishonor God, and is itself beyond the control of the human will. This important and much misunderstood truth is taken up at length in Rom. 7:14-25: "For we know that the law is spiritual: but I am carnal, sold under sin. For that which I do I allow not: for what I would, that do I not; but what I hate, that do I. If then I do that which I would not, I consent unto the law that it is good. Now then it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me. For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh), dwelleth no good thing: for to will is present with me; but

how to perform that which is good I find not. For the good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do. Now if I do that I would not, it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me. I find then a law, that, when I would do good, evil is present with me. For I delight in the law of God after the inward man: but I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death? I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord. So then with the mind I myself serve the law of God; but with the flesh the law of sin."

This battle between the old nature and the new is, then, never gained for God by human power or by religious exercise: but through Christ alone.

Thus the believer is confronted with a threefold impossibility as he contemplates his heavenly responsibility. First: The heavenly position demands a manner of life that is beyond any human possibility. Second: The enemy is stronger than he, and can thwart every resolution. Third: His own fallen nature entices him to do positive evil when he would do good. Notwithstanding this threefold impossibility, there is a clear call to a victorious life, wherein every thought is brought into captivity to the obedience of Jesus Christ (II Cor. 10:5), and if he fails by one degree, he will dishonor the God who has called him.

Where, then, is the relief from this dilemma? It is found only in the power of God. He has provided a complete salvation from the dominion and power of evil, which is a real victory--the only victory for the believer in this present life and conflict. It is a second form or tense of salvation, for it is possible to be saved from the condemnation and penalty of sin, and still for a time to be under its dominion and power. Salvation from the power of the world, the flesh, and the devil, may be secured as freely and completely as the salvation from the penalty of sin, and on the same terms; yet its terms and conditions are so unlike the methods of the world that often it seems unreal, even to Christians.

No instructed person expects to be free from condemnation, or justified before God, by virtue of his moral character; nor can there be freedom from the power of sin by virtue of the resolutions of the human will. Though the Christian life is impossible to human strength, it is within the power of God; and He offers to supply all that He requires, even to a completely victorious life. Since it is necessarily a Divine undertaking, the human part can be no more than an attitude of expectation or faith toward God,--an attitude which reckons self to be helpless, and God alone to be sufficient. It is a perpetual realization of the principle of faith and, therefore, at every point, contradicts Satan's principle of self-help.

Here, as in every human effort to be God-like, Satan's ideals and methods are so thrust upon the world that the natural dependence of the creature upon the Creator is made to seem a weak and unreasonable thing. This worldly mind has found a place in the Church and to a large extent, in spite of the teachings of Scripture; and it is often as difficult to inspire true expectation toward God in the Christian mind in the matter of daily victory, as it is to move the self-righteous and self-sufficient sinner to believe on Christ for regeneration.

True dependence upon the sufficiency of God is thus born of a vision of the utter inability of the natural man to meet the demands of the heavenly citizenship. The world citizen may wrestle against flesh and blood to realize his moral ideals: but he has no heavenly standards to fulfill; no mighty foe to face; and no conflict of natures. Therefore, his low ideals may often be reached by virtue of his own resolution and will. Especially will this method be adequate for the unregenerate, as the energizing power of Satan is working in him to cause him both to will and to do the purpose of Satan (Eph. 2:2): but the faith principle is the only

possible way to victory for the child of God; and it must be faith alone.

As the soul may be eternally lost, while calling upon God to help him save himself: so the saint who only seeks the assistance of God in the exercise of his own power toward a correct manner of life, may be a dishonor to God constantly. The principles of faith and of works can no more be mixed in the one case than in the other. They both present human impossibilities and, therefore, demand the power of God. The Scriptures are clear on this point, both in precept and example:

First: The power of God is the believer's sufficiency in meeting the heavenly demands: "For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure" (Phil. 2:13). "Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think anything as of ourselves: but our sufficiency is of God" (II Cor. 3:5). "But by the grace of God I am what I am: and his grace which was bestowed upon me was not in vain; but I labored more abundantly than they all: yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me" (I Cor. 15:10). "Are ye so foolish? having begun in the Spirit, are ye now made perfect by the flesh?" (Gal. 3:3). "Finally my brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might" (Eph. 6:10). The latter passage is but the natural culmination of the whole revelation of the believer's citizenship and its responsibilities. Therefore, the final counsel is to be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might.

Second: The conflict with the enemy can be a victory only by the power of God. A remarkable revelation is given in the Scriptures of the attitude of the angels toward Satan, and this attitude can well be considered by fallen man. In Jude 9, Michael, the archangel, is seen in controversy with Satan over the body of Moses. There is no revelation as to the time or the occasion of this controversy. It is stated that Moses was buried in secret and was later seen in his transfigured and glorified body, so that it is possible that the removal of the body of Moses from the domain of Satan was the occasion here referred to. The passage is as follows: "But Michael, the archangel, when contending with the devil he disputed about the body of Moses, durst not bring against him a railing accusation, but said, The Lord rebuke thee." In like manner in II Pet. 2:10, the false teachers of the end of this age are said to disregard the heavenly powers (evidently evil) which angels dare not do. "But chiefly them that walk after the flesh in the lust of uncleanness, and despise dominion. Presumptuous are they, self willed, they are not afraid to speak evil of dignities. Whereas angels, which are greater in power and might, bring not railing accusation against them before the Lord." There is probably a just regard, on the part of the angelic beings, for the fact that Satan is the "anointed" of God (Ezek. 28:14). As David would not lift up his hand against Saul because he was the "Lord's anointed" (I Sam. 24:6). Christ is said to be anointed (Ps. 2:2); so also is the believer (I Jno. 2:27). But it is also shown here that the superior wisdom and strength of even Michael, the archangel, and all other celestial beings, is never lifted in conflict with Satan. They rely only upon the same power that is promised the believer, and well may the believer be instructed by their example.

There are two passages where the child of God is directed to resist the devil. The context, however, in both passages warns him that it must be in utter dependence upon the power of God. He must be wholly submitted to God and it must be done through a steadfastness of faith. The passages are as follows: "Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you" (Jas. 4:7). "Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour: whom resist steadfast in the faith" (I Pet. 5:8, 9). And the faith principle is mentioned among the believer's armor in Eph. 6:16 as the "shield of faith" by which all the fiery darts of the enemy are to be quenched.

Third: True character may be realized by the power of God, in spite of the tendency of the fallen nature. This character, however, is that which is directly promised by the power of God: "But the fruit of the Spirit

is love, joy, peace, long suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, self control" (Gal. 5:22, 23). "For the fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness and righteousness and truth" (Eph. 5:9). "Ye are of God, little children, and have overcome them: because greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world" (1 Jno. 4:4). Thus the true God-honoring character is seen to be the result of the power of God, and it is only possible to the one who has "ceased from his own labors and has entered into rest." "This is the victory that overcomes the world, even our faith" (1 Jno. 5:4). This victory demands a constant exercise of faith. Faith is never finished here, and any true progress in the Christian life is "from faith to faith," and it is also said of the one whom God has constituted just, that he shall "live by faith."

The same objection is often raised against the application of the faith principle as a means to the consummation of a victorious life, as is raised against the same principle for regeneration. In this objection it is inferred that when this method is adopted, there is no adequate incentive or motive left for the individual. Such objections arise from a misunderstanding of this truth.

It is useless to undertake the impossible in any case; and in the matter of salvation from the penalty of sin, the only work which it is possible for God to accept as the ground of redemption is that which is already undertaken and fully completed by Christ on the Cross. By this finished work the believer is provided with a perfect standing before God, and is raised to the exalted position of an ambassador for Christ. That privilege of service does not affect the grounds of his salvation, but opens to him the glorious possibility of rewards (1 Cor. 3:9-15). In the matter of salvation from the power of sin, the human will may be employed as an instrument through which the power of God may be manifested. The following passages reveal how directly He proposes to be the real power in the believer's life: "For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure" (Phil. 2:13). "For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war after the flesh: for the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds; casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ" (II Cor. 10:3-5). "I can do all things through Christ which strengthened me" (Phil 4:13). "For apart from me ye can do nothing" (Jno. 15:5).

It is assumed that the believer has recognized the perfectness of the will of God and has thrown his whole being open to His power and guidance. As a little child may avail himself of the wisdom and experience of his parents through obedience, so the believer has become willing to do whatever the infinite wisdom and love of God may choose for him. When thus committed to the will of God, and in true faith depending on Him, the mighty power of the Spirit will work in him and through him to the glory of God. "This I say then, Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh" (Gal. 5:16). "For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death" (Rom. 8:2). Salvation in any form is, therefore, "not of works, lest any man should boast."

It remains to be seen, in view of the perilous position of the believer in the enemy's land, that God has not only provided every needed force for conquest and victory, but has given positive promises for the security of the one He has received on the ground of the shed blood of Christ, "Hast not thou made an hedge about him, and about his house, and about all that he hath on every side?" (Job 1:10). "My Father, which gave them me, is greater than all; and no man (nothing), is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand" (Jno. 10:29). "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" (1 Cor. 10:13). "Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth. Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea, rather that is risen again,

who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written, For Thy sake we are killed all the day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter. Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him that loved us. For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

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