

Can a
Young Man

Overcome?

Arthur
Gook

THE author addresses himself to the young man who, saved by the grace of God and assured of his salvation by God's Holy Word, realizes that he has started a new life, and has opened his eyes on a new world. In the New Testament one of the first things taught to new converts was the possibility of freedom from the power of sin. Hence these pages seek to trace the teachings of the Holy Spirit with regard to the life of victory over sin, and how the Lord Jesus Christ is God's provision for every need of the soul in this regard. Through the Cross of Christ, His Word, and His intercession it is really practicable for those who trust in Christ to overcome the temptations of the world, the flesh and the devil.

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BY
ARTHUR GOOK



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**“THE WORD OF GOD
abideth in you, and ye
have OVERCOME”
(1 John 2. 14)**

CAN A YOUNG MAN OVERCOME?

I.

A Responsibility Resting on YOU

“WHAT is the first thing to be learnt after conversion to Christ?” If you were to submit this question to the next ten Christians you might happen to meet, you would probably receive ten rather diverse answers, each coloured more or less by the personal experience or the ecclesiastical connection of the individual addressed.

Yet there is no question to which a clear, definite answer is more necessary to the young Christian. “I am saved, by the grace of God, and am assured of it by His holy Word. I realise that I have started a new life. I have opened my eyes on a new world. Now what is the first and most important thing for me to learn?” This is naturally the language of a new-born soul.

I am not going to suggest making the interesting experiment mentioned above. I will invite the young believer to come with me straight to the fountain-head, and we will find out what was the first lesson our Lord and Master thought fit to teach young converts.

We find it in John 8. 31-36. Look it up. Our Lord said to those who had recently professed faith in Him: “If ye continue in My Word, then are ye My disciples indeed; and ye shall know the truth,

and the truth shall make you free." Some onlookers* interrupted with the objection that they had never been in bondage to any one, very perversely ignoring some of the outstanding facts of their national history. Our Lord therefore made His statement still plainer, saying in effect that He was not referring to deliverance from national bondage, but from the far more serious bondage of sin (verses 34-36).

Nothing could be clearer than that our Lord deemed the subject of "freedom from sin" to be worthy of the first place in the spiritual education of those who believed in Him.

Now we are not going to be afraid of the expression "free from sin" because it has been misused, nor will we let the vagaries of extremists rob us of a priceless blessing. To be free from sin, in a Scriptural sense, does not mean that there is no more sin in us. The word is not used in the same way as we would, in these days, speak of a chemical compound, for instance, being free from sulphur, or of milk being free from boracic acid. It is used in the sense that a man released from prison is "free." We are thankful that our country is "free" from the dominion of any foreign power, but that does not mean that it is "free" of foreigners in the sense that no alien is to be found within its borders. In the same way, to be "free from sin" does not involve the idea of having attained a state of sinlessness, but it does mean that sin, "though present to tempt and annoy," has no dominion over us.

Just as the first thing written about the Lord

*"They" in verse 33 obviously refers, not to the new converts themselves, but to the hostile crowd around. "They" sought to kill Him (verses 37 and 40), are of their father the Devil (verse 4), believe Him not (verse 45).

Jesus Christ in the New Testament is that "He shall save His people from their sins" (Matt. 1. 21), so the first and most important thing to which our attention is directed, on starting the new life in Christ, is that we should be free from the power of sin. Many other matters must engage our serious thought, but none is so vitally important as this.

Various sections of the Christian Church have given various names to this freedom from the dominion of sin in our lives. Some speak of the "Higher Life," some of the "Deeper Life," some of the "Second blessing." Some rejoice in the "Fulness of the Spirit," or the "Baptism of the Spirit," while others, failing to realise that "if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of His" (Rom. 8. 9), look upon the practical realisation, some time after conversion, of the blessed truth under consideration as "receiving the Holy Spirit."

It seems, however, when allowance is made for great diversity of temperament and our too faulty apprehension of what God is willing to do for us, that all these varying phrases really refer to the same thing, in the practical experience of obedient children of God. Our gracious Heavenly Father does not deny His children a blessing merely because they ask for it by the wrong name.

At the same time it is evident that there is an enormous advantage in having an intelligent understanding of "the things that are freely given to us of God." I know a man in Iceland who purchased a typewriter from abroad, and was very delighted with his new acquisition, but unfortunately he could not understand the book of instructions, which was in English. True, he was able to use the typewriter after a fashion, but it was a clumsy performance. When the instruction book was explained

in detail to him he was able to do much better work with less trouble, and with less damage to the machine. So it is with every blessing God gives us; if we understand what His Word says about it, we are able to use it to bring forth more fruit to His glory and are not so likely to lose or mar it.

Now every Christian is in duty bound to live a life of victory over the power of sin. "Bad tempers," all lack of self-control, selfishness in all its multitudinous forms, duplicity in its various camouflaged manifestations, carelessness as to the ultimate effect of our actions and words on others—all must be ruthlessly condemned as SIN, which it is our bounden duty to overcome.

First of all, it is our bounden duty to the One who loved us and gave Himself for us, to live an overcoming life. He came not only that we should have life, but that we should have it "more abundantly" (John 10. 10). Are you going to rest satisfied with just having spiritual life and, as far as anything further is concerned in your experience, frustrating one purpose of His coming? A thousand arguments could be advanced to prove that it is a shameful thing to shut Him out of a substantial part of our lives. And this we do, if we do not suffer "the Son" to make us "free indeed."

Then again, it is our duty to the world around us to live an overcoming life. Take the smallest possible circle around our lives—those nearest and dearest to us. Whether saved or unsaved, they need all that we might be and do, if we were true overcomers. The larger circle of our fellow-believers needs our efficient help as victorious Christians. Everywhere there is a crying need for young men and women who are not only "disciples indeed," but who have been made "free indeed." The

reason why the apostle's beautiful vision of the Church of God in Ephesians 4. 13-15 is not fulfilled is because "that which every joint supplieth" is often not supplied. What about your part?

You owe to those you meet in business, or in your daily life, to live the victorious life. There are lives you can touch which no one else can touch in just the same way. The responsibility rests upon you to represent Christ to them in the fullest sense possible—to exhibit to their critical eyes a "100 per cent" Christianity.

There are other circles out beyond in the unknown which in the future, if God spare you, you may influence gloriously for Him, but if you do not learn to overcome, you will never do it.

Again, you owe it to your eternal future to live the life of an overcoming Christian. There is a day appointed in the counsels of God, perhaps not far off, when you will certainly have to give an account of your earthly life as a Christian before the Judgment Seat of Christ (Rom. 14. 10; 2 Cor. 5. 10). Nothing will then be hid. Every cargo vessel that sails the seas must have a "manifest," a document which gives exact details of all that the ship carries. "When Christ, who is our life, shall be manifested, then shall ye also be manifested with Him in glory. Mortify, therefore, your members which are upon the earth. . . . Knowing that of the Lord ye shall receive the reward. . . . But he that doeth wrong shall receive for the wrong which he hath done, and there is no respect of persons" (Col. 3). It is a very healthy exercise for the soul to note the promises given to those who "overcome," in our Lord's messages to the seven churches in the second and third chapters of the Revelation. Without going into the question to what extent our failure to overcome will

affect our standing during the future Kingdom of Christ, it is evident that "he that overcometh" has enormous advantages over those who cannot be counted among this class.

I have never forgotten the sad moan of a man who once came to me for help, in a fearful state of mind and body. Unmistakable signs of *delirium tremens* had warned him that he must call a halt on his path of debauchery. He unburdened his soul to me, and told me that he had once professed conversion, and had lived for years in happy fellowship with the Lord's people. "But," said he, "I never really obtained the victory over sin!"

After giving due consideration to the depths to which you might fall if you do not obtain freedom from the bondage of sin, will you take time, in quietness and privacy, to pass before your mental vision all that you may be, in time and eternity, through the power of God working through you, if you learn this first lesson of our Lord to His disciples?

As this is an intensely personal matter and one of the greatest importance to every Christian reader, I earnestly suggest that this chapter be gone over again carefully, in the realised presence of God, all Scripture references being weighed and pondered, and the points definitely checked off and noted down, if there are any, where the reader has failed in the past. Some may find it helpful to fill up the accompanying blank spaces. We cannot be too definite in these matters. Many an earnest soul has doubtless been for years in entire sympathy with all that has been emphasised here, but has failed in not bringing himself to a definite point.

READ (*date*).....

RE-READ, with Scripture references,.....

II.

A Possibility Open to YOU

OUR Lord's first lesson to young believers not only places on every one of us a great responsibility, but also opens the door to a radiant possibility. "The truth shall make you free. . . . Ye shall be free indeed."

True, this glowing promise is prefaced by an "if," but the condition is so simple that none need be hindered from claiming the blessing.

"IF YE CONTINUE IN MY WORD, ye shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free." Our Lord here puts before us the only condition to be fulfilled in order to enter upon the overcoming life—"continuing in His Word." The simplicity of this condition seems at first glance surprising, but when we remember that the salvation which brought us from death to life was according to "God's easy, artless, unencumbered plan," so unlike the tortuous devices of human reasonings, we can readily understand that the same simplicity obtains in His subsequent dealings with us. Nevertheless, while this condition is so simple that all may grasp it, the effects of fulfilling it are very far-reaching. Let us examine it more closely.

"In My Word." This involves looking solely to the Word of God for guidance on our path, and resolutely rejecting anything and everything that vaguely claims only to be "based" on that Word. And it is distinctively the Word of Christ Himself, and the things He commissioned His apostles to teach (John 14. 26; Matt. 28. 20), that will lead us to be overcomers.

"Continue in My Word." Some would doubtless

prefer a convulsive struggle, a tremendous psychological experience, and then a more or less easy time. But Christ's way is not thus. He puts His stamp of approval on steady, quiet growth and progress in the knowledge of His Word, and patient continuance in the paths which that Word has mapped out for us. The flesh chafes at this unsensational and unspectacular method, the world entirely misunderstands it, and the Devil does all he can to seduce us to substitute something else for it. But by continuing in the Word of Christ, we prove that we are "His disciples indeed," we learn to "know the truth," and the truth makes us "free."

It is necessary to note that "continuing in His Word" not only requires diligence in the study of the Scriptures, but the subjection of our lives to their teachings. Mere intellectual knowledge of the truth, without sincere subjection to it, will only condemn us. As the light falls on each step before us, we must seek humbly, but boldly, in the strength of the Lord, and at any cost, to take that step.

Paul, the apostle, repeated and amplified what His Master had begun to teach on this subject. There is a remarkable similarity between his words in Romans 6. 14-18 and our Lord's words in John 8, which we have been considering. Paul repeats the truth that whosoever committeth sin is the bond-servant of sin (verse 16) and his version of "continuing in the Word of Christ" is very emphatic. With him it is "becoming obedient from the heart to that form (or pattern) of teaching whereunto ye were delivered" (R. V.). As molten metal is poured into a mould, where it adjusts itself and takes on a new form, so our lives, melted in Love's crucible, are to be moulded and fashioned by the teachings of our Lord and His apostles.

The apostle declares as triumphantly and emphatically as His Master that we may be "free indeed." "Sin," he says, "shall not have dominion over you."

"YE SHALL KNOW THE TRUTH." This is "the truth which is according to godliness" (Titus 1. 1; 1 Tim. 6. 3), the truth concerning our Lord Jesus Christ and His great work of "making free" the bond-servants of sin, which is described in the New Testament and shall be our guide in subsequent chapters.

"THE TRUTH SHALL MAKE YOU FREE." "The bond-servant abideth not in the house for ever"—our slavery to sin need not be permanent. But there is one thing that is permanent, that is the indwelling of the Son—"the Son abideth ever." So that if He makes us free, we shall be "free indeed," and need not be haunted by the sickening fear of being led into captivity again.

The Apostle Paul was very anxious that the converts in Ephesus should know experimentally the "exceeding greatness" of the power of God toward believers, and he declared that God exercises towards such the same mighty power as that which He exercised when He raised Christ from the dead and set Him at His own right hand in the heavenlies, far above all other "power, and might, and dominion" (Eph. 1. 19-21).

This is a stupendous thought, but it is perfectly true. It is a truth which, if we know it, will make us free.

Is there any reason why we, knowing what is the exceeding greatness of His power toward us, should not triumph, through our Lord Jesus Christ, over all "power, and might, and dominion" that are arrayed against us?

When Joshua had completed his victory over the

14 What Exactly is "The World?"

five kings of the Amorites, he brought them out of the cave where they were hidden and, calling his captains, bade them put their feet upon the necks of the kings. When they had done so, he said: "Fear not, nor be dismayed, be strong and of good courage, for thus shall the Lord do to all your enemies whom ye fight" (Josh. 10. 23-25).

Our blessed Lord Jesus won a complete victory over the world, the flesh; and the Devil, when, having passed through Calvary's dark hour, He rose triumphant from the dead. Now, in His Word, He drags out into the light of day these our spiritual foes and bids us trample them under foot. "Thus shall the Lord do to all your enemies."

Let us see how it is to be done.

III.

Overcoming the World

IF we are going to overcome "the world," we must understand exactly what "the world" is. The first step to be taken in dealing with any enemy is to know who or what he is, what his objective is and what he is capable of.

Loyalty to our Lord Jesus Christ would naturally lead us to form our estimate of the world in the light of its relation to Him, as shown in the Word of God. This is our only safe criterion. We do not need to search far in order to find out the attitude of the world to Christ. In the 10th verse of the 1st chapter of John's Gospel, we read: "He (Christ) was in the world, and the world was made by Him, and the world knew Him not." In the 15th chapter our Lord's words are given: "If the world hate you, ye know that it hated Me before it hated you. If ye

were of the world, the world would love His own, but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you" (verses 18, 19).

Thus, briefly, "the world" is that great aggregate of men and women living on this globe, who "know Him not." And He who "searcheth the reins and hearts" (Rev. 2. 23), declares that this "world" in its essential characteristics hates Him and His people.

We find, moreover, that this "world" has a leader, a "prince." This is not Christ, for He said emphatically: "My Kingdom is not of this world." Our Lord spoke of "the prince of this world" being cast out (John 12. 31); and said, shortly before His death: "The prince of this world cometh, and hath nothing in Me" (John 14. 30). He also stated that the Holy Spirit should reprove the world of judgment "because the prince of this world is judged" (John 16. 11).

If we are in any doubt as to who this "prince of the world" is, the record of our Lord's temptation in the wilderness will make it clear to us. There the Evil One showed Him all the Kingdoms of the world, and said: "All this power will I give Thee, and the glory of them; for that is delivered unto me; and to whomsoever I will I give it" (Luke 4. 6). The fact that our Lord did not contradict this statement, taken together with His references on three occasions to this world's "prince," shows us that "the whole world lieth in the Evil One" (1 John 5. 19, R. V.). The Creator put the sceptre into the hands of the first man, Adam (Gen. 1. 26 and 28). He delivered it to Satan at the Fall (cf. Rom. 6. 16), and in his hands it has remained and will remain until the "Second Man, the Lord from

Heaven" shall wrest it from him, and "the kingdoms of this world" shall "become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ and He shall reign for ever and ever" (Rev. 11. 15).

Not only is this so, but we are told that he who blinds the minds of unbelievers, so that they should not believe the Gospel—manifestly the Evil One—is "the god of this world" (2 Cor. 4. 4). So that his fearful ascendancy not only obtains in the government of this world, but also in its religion.

It is very evident, then, that there can be no compromise between a disciple of Christ and such a "world." Indeed, the Scripture tells us very plainly that "if any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him" (1 John 2. 15), and that "whosoever will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God" (James 4. 4). In his remarkable second letter to the Corinthians the Apostle Paul appeals to them not to be "yoked together with unbelievers," but to separate themselves from all that is unclean, and then the Lord Almighty will be a Father to them (2 Cor. 6. 14-18).

In each of these three passages the believer is brought face to face with the plain choice between two absolutely incompatible things—the fellowship of the Father and the fellowship of the world. He may have one, or he may have the other, but both he cannot have. There is absolutely no room whatever for compromise.

An old Danish fable purports to explain the origin of that peculiar mammal, the bat. There was once war between the birds and the mice. One bird would not take a stand with its fellows, but wanted to be on both sides. When peace was made, it was despised by both parties and was condemned to be half bird, half mouse, for ever. Thus we have

the bat! The fable adds that it is now so ashamed of itself that it never ventures out except after dark.

There are few things more pitiful than the professing Christian who, while he would fain keep company with those who "mount up on wings" and explore heavenly realities, at the same time cannot forego the delights he finds in those who are "of the earth, earthy." Oh, beloved fellow Christian, don't be a bat!

It is in direct connection with the subject of friendship with the world that the Scripture says: "The Spirit that dwelleth in us lusteth to envy," or "desireth enviously" (James 4. 5). The Holy Spirit yearns jealously to draw each blood-bought child of God, in whom He dwells, away from all defiling associations, that he may live wholly for Christ; and when he sees a believer allowing the things of this world to cool his zeal and love for his Lord, He is "grieved" and, in the Scriptural phrase, "desireth enviously" that life, with all its undeveloped possibilities, for Christ and His service.

Abraham's unnamed servant conducted Rebekah across the wilderness that she might become the bride of his master's son, and is a striking picture of the Holy Spirit leading the Church on to meet her Master, the Lord Jesus Christ. Had Rebekah cast wanton eyes on any other, we can understand the jealous zeal of Abraham's servant, on behalf of Isaac. The Holy Spirit, on Christ's behalf, "desireth enviously" every part of our ransomed being and "grieves" when He sees it prostituted to "the world" (James 4. 4, 5).

Worldly friendships and worldly ways, in their various camouflages, ought not to appeal to a real lover of our Lord Jesus Christ. If they do, it proves that he is not overcoming the world. Compromise with the world is the sure way of defeat.

In Sumatra, I understand, they have an effective way of catching tigers. A bait is prepared in a likely place and is surrounded by masses of fallen leaves, to which some adhesive substance has been freely applied. At first, when a tiger draws near, a few leaves stick to his paws, and he sits down, like a huge cat, and tries to get rid of them. Of course, every movement makes him worse and worse and the moment soon arrives when the tiger rolls over in anger in the effort to free himself from the leaves that annoy him. This completes his discomfiture. Clawing madly at the leaves, he rolls over and over until he is soon a huge, writhing, snarling, spitting mass of sticky leaves. After a few hours of this he is worn out and becomes an easy prey to the wily tiger hunter.

Worldly habits have a way of "sticking" to us more than we at first suspect.

The story is told of a soldier who, during some operations in a maze of trenches, shouted out in the darkness to his superior officer that he had taken a prisoner. "Bring him along round here!" ordered the officer. After about a minute's delay, the voice sounded again out of the darkness, very much out of breath: "Please, sir, he won't come!" "Well, then, come along back here yourself," shouted the officer, who was contemplating moving on. After a further delay, the voice was again heard, somewhat more faintly: "Please, sir, he won't let me!"

In like manner many find to their cost that in seeking to "gain the world"—or a small part of it—they have themselves been overcome by it and are held captive.

It would be beside the point to go into details of the many things belonging essentially to this world that trip up Christians and wreck their testimony,

either known or unknown to themselves. Our object is not so much to show how this or that worldly temptation may be overcome, but how to overcome the world itself. It is not enough to pull off a twig here and there—the axe must be laid to the root of the tree.

* * * * *

I now wish to draw the reader's attention to what is, considering the circumstances in which it was spoken, one of the most remarkable sentences ever uttered. It is this:

“BE OF GOOD CHEER; I HAVE OVERCOME THE WORLD.”

The One who said these words stood apparently on the brink of disaster. He knew that the representatives of this world's government and religion were about to arrest Him and, with the approval of the populace, consign Him to a fearful and ignominious death. He knew, moreover, that those whom He had chosen out of the world would for the most part prove untrue to Him and that the most prominent among them would deny Him. And yet He said: “I have overcome the world!”

Some people foolishly think that Christ “overcame the world” when His reputed followers, some centuries later, made a series of shameful compromises with the pagan world in order to increase the number of nominal adherents to nominal Christianity. But our Lord claimed to have overcome the world in the days of His rejection, yea, with the shadow of the awful Cross looming over Him.

In what sense, then, did He overcome the world? His own words give us the answer. “The Prince of this world cometh, and hath nothing in Me” (John 14. 30). This world's prince had come to Him before—in the wilderness, at the commence-

ment of His public career—and had been put to flight. At the close of that career, the enemy had still not advanced a hairbreadth in his attempt to introduce the principles of this world into the life of our Lord. “He hath nothing in Me.” The leaders of this world might arrest Him, try Him, scourge Him, crucify Him—and they did—but they could never overcome Him. Throughout His whole career He consistently refused to accept the principles which actuate the children of this world.

Scientists tell us that if a man were on the moon, he could, other conditions permitting, carry several sacks of flour on his back, whereas the weight of one would crush him to death if he were on a sphere as large as the sun. On the moon, he could leap a height of many feet, while, supposing he could live on the sun, he would find great difficulty in lifting a limb.

The reason for this is the great difference of gravity on these respective spheres. The moon, being smaller than this earth, has less power of attraction, and all weights would be relatively less there. The sun, being immensely larger, has a power of attraction compared with which that obtaining on this earth is very feeble indeed.

Coming from a sphere of infinitely greater moral and spiritual gravity, Christ found this world a poor, petty thing at its best. He weighed up its whole content against one human soul, and found it lighter. He assessed the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes and the pride of life, which the Apostle John tells us is “all that is in the world,” at their right values. This world failed completely to draw Him to itself. Its prince had “nothing in Him.” The attraction of that holy sphere where the Father’s will is supreme, was never counteracted by the attraction of this earthly sphere.

But this is not all. He said that the "prince of this world" would be cast out, and that if He were "lifted up," He would draw all men to Himself (John 12. 32). Not only did He resist the attraction of this world, but He introduced a new centre of gravity. He was "lifted up" on the Cross, and ever since then the mighty power of heavenly gravity has, through Him and His Cross, drawn all kinds and conditions of men "from the power of Satan unto God."

Now this complete victory of Christ opens up the way for us also to "overcome the world." The Holy Spirit, speaking by John, says: "Whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world, and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith. Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God?" (1 John 5. 4, 5).

Born as children of this world, we are bound by sheer power of attraction to worldly motives and ideals. But when, by faith in Him who was "lifted up" to die for us, we are "born of God," a great counter-attraction—that of another and higher sphere—begins to make itself felt in our lives. The oft-quoted expression, "born again," in John 3. 3, is more correctly, "born from above," as the Revised Version has it. This new and heavenly birth makes us citizens of the heavenly sphere "where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God." "Our citizenship is in Heaven" (Phil. 3. 20, R. V.). Henceforth "as He is, so are we in this world" (1 John 4. 17).

Heaven's attraction grows greater and greater, as we occupy ourselves more and more with "the things that are above," and this sinful world's "pull" on us grows correspondingly less and less.

Belonging by new birth to another sphere, where the moral and spiritual gravity is so much greater, we "mount up with wings as eagles," for this world's influences cannot weigh us down. Greater burdens can be borne, and with greater ease. The burden Christ asked His disciples to share must have looked truly appalling from the view-point of a worldling. To a prospective disciple He said: "The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man hath not where to lay His head" (Matt. 8. 20; cf. also Luke 14. 26, 27 and 33). Yet He could truly say: "My yoke is easy, and My burden is light," because in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him that loved us. They cannot weigh down one who has been "born from above" and is enjoying the privileges of his new birthright.

This blessing, like all others, is appropriated by "our faith." "This is the victory that overcometh the world—our faith" (1 John 5. 4). How is this faith to be exercised? May I be permitted to offer the reader a little practical help?

You doubtless believe the words of the apostle, that God, who is rich in mercy, for His great love wherewith He loved us—even when we were dead in sins—hath quickened us together with Christ and hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus (Eph. 2. 4-6).

Whatever conception you may have had of this truth in the past, or even if you have never given it much attention, will you now try to think of things in the same way as you would if you were actually seated by the side of your Divine Master in Heaven, looking down from His point of view on this poor, sinful world? See—as He sees—the rewards and treasures of this world, stripped of their glittering

disguises, in all their naked vanity. Weigh—in His balances—all that men seek after and sacrifice their true blessedness to obtain. Cast your eyes upon those worldly prizes or fellowships that have been a snare to your own soul.

And after you have gazed to the full, slip down humbly to His feet, and look up into His all-comprehending, sympathetic eyes, and whisper to Him: "Lord, forbid that I should glory, save in the Cross on which Thou, the Prince of glory, didst die, by whom the world is crucified to me, and I unto the world!"

Now lay this book down for a few minutes and do it.

IV.

Overcoming the Flesh

WE now turn to another deadly enemy of our souls—"the flesh." Briefly this means "self," and its sphere is, in one word, "self-pleasing"—the normal life of the unregenerate man. Its range is very wide indeed. "The flesh" may be very refined and respectable, very gifted and attractive, or it may manifest itself in very repulsive forms.

The "works of the flesh" are enumerated in Galatians 5. 19-21. Besides the grosser varieties of self-pleasing generally known as "sins of the flesh," this list includes such items as "jealousies, wraths, factions, divisions, parties (*i.e.* heresies) and envyings." Even the exemplary life of Saul of Tarsus, who, touching the righteousness which is in the law, was blameless, is described as coming within the sphere of "the flesh" (Phil. 3. 3-7).

The carnal principle underlying the self-pleasing of an unregenerate man persists even when he is

converted, and a strife ensues between the new Divine nature, of which he is made a partaker (2 Peter 1. 4), and the old natural tendencies of "the flesh."

These tendencies must be overcome, chiefly for three reasons:

1. Because "they that are in the flesh cannot please God" (Rom. 8. 8). This does not mean that those who are *living in the body* are necessarily incapable of pleasing God. "Before his translation Enoch had this testimony, that he pleased God" (Heb. 11. 5). Many other Scriptures are agreeable to this. The passage undoubtedly means that they who "walk after the flesh," who are "carnally minded," cannot please God.

Every believer has, then, the choice of pleasing God or pleasing "self" as a rule of life, and the two alternatives are irreconcilable. We can do one, but not both, for "the mind of the flesh is enmity against God" (Rom. 8. 7, R.V.). Our Lord said: "I do always those things that please the Father" (John 8. 29), and His apostle said: "We make it our aim, whether at home or absent, to be well-pleasing unto Him" (2 Cor. 5. 9, R.V.).

If we do not overcome the flesh and deny its persistent claims, we cannot please God. This is the first and most important reason why we should overcome the flesh.

2. Another reason is that "the mind of the flesh is death, but the mind of the Spirit is life and peace" (Rom. 8. 6, R.V.). It is very evident that the "works of the flesh" as given in Galatians 5. 19-21 lead directly to death, both physical and spiritual, and that the "fruits of the Spirit," given in the subsequent verses, tend to physical and spiritual life. Overcoming the flesh means that we make choice

of the "fruits of the Spirit" and spurn the "works of the flesh." Our choice opens to us the enjoyment of the more abundant life and of the peace of God, which passeth understanding.

3. Our third reason is found in the solemn warning to the Galatian Christians: "Be not deceived, God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption, but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting" (Gal. 6. 7, 8).

If we do not overcome "the flesh," "the flesh" will overcome us. In the Old Testament Amalek was a consistent type of "the flesh." Ordered to crush this enemy completely, Israel rendered only partial obedience (1 Sam. 15). Centuries later Haman the Agagite, an Amalekite, came within an ace of wiping out the whole of the Jewish nation within the bounds of the vast empire of Babylon (Esther 3 to 7). If we spare our carnal, self-pleasing nature, we run a truly awful risk of being some day overcome by it, to our undoing.

How, then, are we to overcome the flesh?

Here again the Divine answer is simplicity itself: "WALK IN THE SPIRIT, AND YE SHALL NOT FULFIL THE LUST OF THE FLESH" (Gal. 5. 16). The first part of this verse is a command or a direction. The second part is a plain statement of the inevitable consequence of obedience to that command. Our attention is to be focused not so much on a negative effort: "not fulfilling the lust of the flesh," as on a positive command: to "walk in the Spirit."

Notice that the simile of "walking"—first one step, then another—is chosen by the Spirit of God to guide us in this important matter. Some might suppose that victory over "the flesh" is only the

heritage of those who "mount up on wings" and soar to dizzy heights of spiritual experience, or of those who are strong leaders in the race. But no—we are bidden to "walk" in the Spirit. We can all do that.

We have all, no doubt, at times been painfully conscious of the truth in the next verse, that "the flesh lusteth against the Spirit." Possibly the fact that "the Spirit lusteth against the flesh" has not made so great an impression on us. Yet we do well to consider that, however persistent "the flesh" may be, the Spirit is still more persistent; whatever inducements "the flesh" may hold out to us, the Spirit holds out still greater. All that the word "lusteth" implies is applied, in a good sense, to the Holy Spirit, who broods over the believer in Christ, whom He has sealed as His own, and "lusteth"—that is, desires with exceeding and persistent longing—to give him the victory over the tyranny of "the flesh" and to make him like Christ. In the previous chapter we saw that the Spirit "lusteth enviously" against "the world." He takes the same attitude to "the flesh."

The decision rests continually with us, as to which way the tide of battle shall flow. If we take sides with "the flesh," "the flesh" gains the victory and the Spirit is "grieved." If we take sides with the Spirit and "walk in the Spirit," He gains a glorious victory.

The apostle addresses a remarkable exhortation to the Ephesians (chap. 5. 17, 18): "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." It is striking to notice that in at least three other passages of Holy Scripture the comparison is made between the influence of wine and the power of the Spirit of God (Jer. 23. 9; Luke 1. 15; Acts 1. 13). This seemingly incon-

gruous comparison is not made without design. It is well known that a man under the influence of wine is often completely transformed and behaves in a way entirely inconsistent with his normal temperament. A dull, stolid individual becomes profusely demonstrative and wants to make a speech. A talkative, excitable person becomes dull and morose. Similarly a quiet, retiring Christian, to whom normally the idea of speaking in public would involve mental anguish, is able, when endued with the power of the Spirit, to address a large company with perfect ease. By the same Divine power a man who is naturally hot-tempered is enabled with perfect composure to endure insults or irritating interferences which before would have provoked a storm. In both instances there is a victory of the Spirit over "the flesh."

Again, it is well known that few become drunkards with their first glass of wine. Intending at first, no doubt, to be moderate drinkers, they indulge with increasing frequency until at last wine has an irresistible attraction for them and they are hopelessly overcome. So with the power of the Spirit. As we give way more and more to His divinely ennobling and inspiring influences and obey Him as He reminds us of the words of our Master (John 14. 26), and guides us into all truth (John 16. 13), the things of the Spirit become more and more attractive to us, and we become "filled with the Spirit," the result being that we do not "fulfil the lusts of the flesh" (Gal. 5. 16).

This remarkable simile fails, however, in one important respect, which must be mentioned ere we pass on. The apostle points it out in the words, "wherein is excess." A man under the influence of wine goes to all kinds of excesses, but a man filled with the Spirit never does.

There is an interesting prohibition concerning the priests in the temple described in the 44th chapter of Ezekiel. They were forbidden, on the one hand, to shave their heads, and on the other to suffer their locks to grow long (verse 20, note also verse 21). Extremes were to be avoided; they were merely to cut their hair in the ordinary way. There is still a very common tendency to go to extremes in one direction or another in the service of God. Figuratively speaking, the head is either shaven close, or the locks are profusely long. But this is not of the Spirit. The well-balanced way is God's way, to adhere closely to *all* the Word of God, carefully weighed in His presence, and not to give undue prominence to favourite passages, wrenched from their context. If we "walk in the Spirit," our life will be moulded after the pattern of the life of Christ on earth, which was one of perfect poise.

We must now consider what is involved by "walking in the Spirit."

1. "Put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof" (Rom. 13. 14). This involves a "blockade" of the flesh. We shall not allow anything to pass through that would feed the carnal nature. Exit questionable things! Our recreation, our reading, our tastes and habits will need to pass a rigid censorship, lest we carelessly and thoughtlessly "make provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof."

2. "They that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts" (Gal. 5. 24). "Our old man (nature) was crucified with Him" (Rom. 6. 6, R.V.). "Reckon ye also yourselves to be dead unto sin, but alive unto God in Christ Jesus" (Rom. 6. 11).

Nowhere in the New Testament is it taught that

our old sinful nature dies out entirely, while we live here in this scene. It is to be "crucified" and "reckoned to be dead." Some confusion has been caused by a failure to recognise that crucifixion does not necessarily imply absolute extinction of life. We all know that it is an extraordinarily slow method of execution. Figuratively it indicates potential death, for death must and will come in the end. But in the meantime the crucified body still has life. It may be "reckoned" already dead, but within certain limits it may assert itself. While hanging on their crosses on Calvary, the two thieves made decisions that separated them for eternity.

Our "flesh" is to be kept in the place of death—crucified—and "reckoned dead." What may we do with our hands? Only that which is conformable to the One who hung on the Cross for us, for they must be "reckoned" to be nailed to His Cross. Where may our feet take us? Only where our once crucified Lord would go, for they, too, are fastened to His Cross. His tongue "clave to His jaws" when He was brought into the dust of death (Psa. 22. 15), and our tongue will cleave to our jaws, if we are crucified with Him, and we shall learn how to keep silence, and how to break it, as it pleases Him. His brow was pierced by sharp thorns when He suffered for us, and our every thought will be "brought into captivity to Christ" if we are crucified with Him. His heart was broken, and pierced with a cruel spear when He had borne our burden; and our hearts' affections will be lovingly, trustingly confided to His controlling care, if we truly are crucified with Christ.

3. A very important factor in our victory over "the flesh" is our mental and spiritual outlook. It is a psychical law that we tend to become like

that which we fix our mind's eye upon. Hence the numerous passages in the New Testament which draw our attention to our blessed Lord and exhort us to meditate upon Him. As we do this the power of "the flesh" is broken. In Philippians 3. 20, 21 the apostle, after referring to those "who mind earthly things," says: "Our citizenship is in Heaven, whence also we wait for a Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ who shall fashion anew the body of our humiliation, that it may be conformed to the body of His glory, according to the working whereby He is able even to subject all things to Himself" (R.V.). The Apostle John says similarly: "We know that, if He shall be manifested, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him even as He is. And every one that hath this hope set on Him purifieth himself, even as He is pure" (1 John 3. 2, 3, R.V.). Our glorious destiny is to be "conformed to the image of God's Son" (Rom. 8. 29). We should therefore "run with patience the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus" (Heb. 12. 1, 2). It is the Holy Spirit's avowed work to take of the things of Christ and declare them unto us (John 16. 15), and this is His greatest weapon in warring against "the flesh" in believers.

As the image on which the lens of a camera is focused is reproduced on the sensitive plate inside, so is the image of Christ traced on our inner life as we fix our gaze upon Him. Let us seek, then, to focus sharply and let us have all the light the Word of God gives us, so that our reproduction may not be blurred and indistinct, but "with unveiled face beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord," we may be "transformed into the same image from glory to glory, even as from the Lord the Spirit" (2 Cor. 3. 18). Then we shall "overcome the flesh."

V.

Overcoming the Devil

THERE are seductions, snares, wiles, that meet the Christian in his daily conflict, which cannot be attributed either to "the world" or "the flesh." They may be quite unworldly and, so far from being carnal, they may even have the appearance of great spirituality. Such are the "wiles of the Devil." It is a good thing for us that we need not be "ignorant of his devices" (2 Cor. 2. 11), seeing that they are revealed for our warning and protection in the Word of God.

Sometimes that which is "devilish" is "earthly" and "sensual" too (as, for instance, worldly wisdom as described in James 3. 15), but, having considered "the world" and "the flesh" in detail, our purpose is now to inquire how we may overcome that which is essentially of the Evil One.

We must first examine his "devices."

We read that our Lord was "in all points tempted like as we are" (Heb. 4. 15). We may therefore learn much from His temptation by the Devil in the wilderness, seeing that we may expect to be tempted in the same way. The essential point common to the three temptations which the Evil One brought before the Lord Jesus is that they were all "short cuts" to that which would be perfectly legitimate when the time came.

1. Driven by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted before commencing His public work, our Lord had to face the culmination of His temptations while suffering the pangs of hunger. Taking advantage of His physical need, the tempter put before Him the expedient of cutting the testing-

time short by exerting the power He knew He possessed and which He exercised later to feed thousands, so that He might hunger no more. It was quite a legitimate thing to satisfy hunger, but His eye was on the Father, awaiting the word from His lips to relieve His deep need, and until that word came, He would go on hungering, for He could truly say: "My meat is to do the will of Him that sent Me" (John 4. 34).

2. Again, the power and glory of "all the kingdoms of the world" belong to our Lord Jesus by right, and the time will certainly come when He will take that power and reign. But He would not accept it by any compromise with the evil "Prince of this world." He had to be "cast out." The force of this temptation was that Christ was offered His legitimate rank as King of kings and Lord of lords, without going to the Cross and "saving His people from their sins." The price of this compromise was the acceptance of, or acquiescence in, the principles of Satan as overlord (Luke 4. 5-7).

3. Failing in this, the Evil One put before our Lord the suggestion that He could obtain immediate recognition as the Son of God and win popularity at once among the crowd that thronged the Temple, by making a spectacular exhibition of His divine power. What greater appeal could be made to the Jews than to let them behold this new Teacher coming to them, borne up on angel's hands, from the very pinnacle of their sacred temple?

These "devices" of Satan are often used to deceive the Lord's people. The temptation is "in all points" the same as we experience. When we are being tested, preparatory to a time of blessing or greater service, the Evil One will put before us a "short cut," involving a departure from principle, to

enable us to bring the testing to a premature close. By this device he mars the life and service of great numbers of God's people. Our business is to do God's will and to await God's time, and not to worry about the consequences.

The Evil One also leads many Christians astray by persuading them that, if they compromise somewhat with the principles of this world and attain thereby influence and power among the "kingdoms of the world," they will be able to further the cause of Christ. Our Lord saw through this artifice and, in His answer, definitely repudiated any compromise. If we would loyally follow Him, we shall do the same.

Again, the Devil finds his ruse of offering the servants of Christ a quick and cheap popularity with the unthinking world, a very successful bait indeed.

The words with which our Lord disposes of the last-named temptation: "Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God!" should be borne in mind whenever our faith is tested. The temptation in the wilderness was permitted by the Father in order that the unswerving loyalty of Christ might be proved and manifested by direct test. *Our* loyalty is often very dubious and needs to be tested again and again. In cities where the tramway system includes steep hills, I understand that the brakes on every tramcar are subjected to a severe test every morning, in order that any irregularity may be discovered and adjusted before any danger is incurred. Our faithful God needs to test us very often, in order that failings may be revealed and corrected, before they bring us to a shameful fall.

Our Lord's quotation is from Deuteronomy 6. 16, where the words are added: "as ye tempted Him at

Massah." This refers us back to the occasion when the children of Israel had no water to drink in the wilderness and "tempted (or tested) the Lord, saying: Is the Lord among us, or not?" (Exod. 17.1-7).

A superficial thinker might have exulted in the wonderful miracle that took place in order that their need might be supplied, and have boasted of a glorious experience. But Israel's behaviour under this time of testing is a lasting reproach to them. Four times in Deuteronomy, twice in the Psalms and once in Hebrews it is recalled to their shame.

God's purpose in testing His people is declared in Deuteronomy 8. 16: "That He might prove thee, to do thee good at thy latter end." As in the case of Job, the end proved, in spite of appearances, in the meanwhile, that "the Lord is very pitiful and of tender mercy" (James 5. 11).

The sin of Israel was that, when God was testing them, they turned round and "tested God, saying: Is the Lord among us, or not?" As if God needed "testing," after all the mighty works that He had done for them in Egypt and at the Red Sea!

After all that God has done for us, at the place called Calvary and ever since, how utterly disloyal is the thought: "Is the Lord among us, or not?" The water is in the Rock, waiting to gush forth to relieve our deep distress the moment the word is given by Him who is "very pitiful and of tender mercy." He "will not suffer you to be tested above that ye are able, but will with the testing also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it" (1 Cor. 10. 13). Let us, therefore, meekly endure each testing as it comes, turn a deaf ear to Satan's ready suggestions of short cuts—"ways to escape" that God has not provided—and seek diligently to discover and correct the flaws and failings in our-

selves that the testing was intended to reveal. (See also 1 Peter 1. 5-7.)

4. One of the most dangerous devices of the Evil One is referred to in 2 Corinthians 11. 3, where Paul writes: "I fear lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtilty, so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ." From the earliest days of Church history the Evil One has been busy corrupting the minds of Christians from the simplicity that is in Christ (*lit.*, "as to the Christ"). All kinds of theories and irreverent speculations as to the Person of our Lord have been rife. Every now and then prominence is given to one who is wise "above that which is written," who "intrudes into those things which he hath not seen," and "draws away disciples after him," causing a new schism in the Church of Christ. This has been one of Satan's most successful weapons in his unceasing warfare against the saints of God.

We read that the men of Beth-shemesh were smitten because they had looked into the Ark of the Lord (1 Sam. 6. 19). The fact that they had offered burnt-offerings and sacrificed sacrifices unto the Lord before the Ark did not excuse them.

In spite of their revived interest in the Ark and all it had meant to Israel, these men of Beth-shemesh probably did not spend time discussing the question, whether the tree from which the shittim-wood was taken had come from the same seed as other shittim-wood trees, or whether the shittim-wood of which it was made was capable of rotting like other wood, were it not for the gold that overlaid it—and then excommunicating those of their brethren who held a different shittim-wood theory to their own, or at any rate did not express it in the same terms. Being ignorant, uncultured Hebrews of the days of Samuel,

and not educated Christians of the nineteenth or twentieth century, they most likely refrained from these niceties, and just lifted up the mercy-seat and peered into the Ark. This wonderful type of our Lord Jesus Christ had to be guarded from irreverent curiosity, and judgment fell upon them.

Surely God is not more jealous of the honour of the Ark, the mere type, than He is of His Son, the Antitype. "Without controversy, great is the mystery of Godliness. God was manifest in the flesh" (1 Tim. 3. 16). With simple but sublime statements such as this, we do well to be satisfied; but Satan seeks to "corrupt our minds from simplicity as to the Christ" and unsettle them with all kinds of doubts and bewildering doctrines.

5. Another of his devices is to seduce the professed servants of God to ignore the Atonement and to count among the people of God those who are not redeemed. A remarkable instance of this occurs in 1 Chronicles 21: "Satan stood up against Israel and provoked David to number Israel." Now it was distinctly commanded in the Law (Exod. 30. 11-16), that whenever the children of Israel were numbered, they should give "every man a ransom for his soul." The rich was not to give more, nor the poor less, than half a shekel. This was to represent "an atonement for their souls." If a census were taken and the ransom omitted, a plague would be sent among them.

David commands a census to be taken, and apparently he, Joab, and all his court have so neglected the reading of the Law that they are unaware of the fact that the atonement money has to be taken on such an occasion under penalty of a plague—though Joab seems to have had an inkling of the truth, and performs his part of the work

under protest. The plague comes, and many lose their lives; and it is not until the atonement is formally recognised by the King, as representative of the nation, that it is taken away. When David builds an altar and offers up burnt-offerings and peace-offerings, the destroying angel puts up his sword. No one had a right, in those days, to be numbered with the people of God, unless he had, in figure, signified his interest in the atonement. No one has a right, in these days, to be numbered with the people of God, unless he rests by faith on the atoning work of Christ. Satan seeks ever to undermine this truth, and when he succeeds, the plague of spiritual death ensues.

6. Another of Satan's devices is to draw Christians from the stern path of duty to an easier path, to follow the line of least (or lesser) resistance. For this purpose he apparently prefers to use those we love, and succeeds thereby in producing numerous "jelly-fish" Christians. When our Lord told His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things and be killed and be raised again, Peter rebuked Him, saying: "Be it far from Thee, Lord! This shall not be unto Thee!" Our Lord saw at once whence this suggestion came, albeit Peter was the mouthpiece, and He replied: "Get thee behind Me, Satan!" He then went on to say, for our instruction and warning on this point: "If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself and take up his cross, and follow Me" (Matt. 16. 21-25).

7. Another much-used device of the Evil One is to inflate Christians with spiritual pride. He played upon Eve's pride in the beginning. In later years the warning is given, that no novice is to be allowed to take the office of bishop (overseer) in the Church of God, "lest, being lifted up with

pride, he fall into the condemnation of the Devil" (1 Tim. 3. 6).

Very possibly the words of Ezekiel 28. 17: "Thine heart was lifted up because of thy beauty," refer more to the "Prince of this world" than to the literal king of Tyre (to whom verses 13-15 could hardly be made to apply); and Isaiah 14. 12-14 seem likewise to refer to the former history of this awful being: "Thou hast said in thine heart: I will ascend into Heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God . . . I will be like the Most High." There was One who "thought it *not* a thing to be grasped at, to be equal with God," who "humbled Himself" (Phil. 2. 6-8), and who said: "I am meek and lowly in heart" (Matt. 11. 29).

The Devil has no better way of making a Christian at once unlike Christ and like himself than by puffing him up with pride. One of his best weapons to attain this end is flattery, in the use of which he has a surprising number of helpers. One of the most insidious forms of pride manifests itself in a stilted spirituality which repels, instead of attracts, those who most need our help. In the Middle Ages, when the Bible was kept in the background, many imagined blindly that true spirituality consisted in wearing a distinctive garb and shutting oneself up in a cloister. Some went even farther and caused pillars to be erected, ten to twenty feet high and a feet feet in diameter, on which they spent the remainder of their lives, before the gaze of an admiring public, which superstitiously regarded them as of uncommon sanctity. These so-called "pillar-saints" have their spiritual successors even to the present day.

A very good test of true spirituality is, whether it attracts little children. Hymnology is not always

Scriptural, but the title of "Friend for little children," given to our Lord in a well-known hymn, surely rings true. While it is not in itself by any means a sign of true spirituality to be a "children's man," yet one who is living in unhindered fellowship with his Lord will surely have the love and patience to understand and sympathize with the feelings of a little child. To humble oneself and become as a little child is a condition of entry into the Kingdom of Heaven. And within that Kingdom he that humbles himself as a little child is greatest of all (Matt. 18. 3, 4). No doubt most of us will have intense sympathy with the little girl's petition, "O, God, please make the bad people good; and, will you *please* make the good people *nice*!" This prayer speaks volumes.

May the Lord preserve us from the spiritual pride that places us on a pillar out of reach of the very youngest and humblest of those among whom our lot is cast. We need to guard carefully against this "wile of the Devil."

8. The Devil is described in Revelation 12. 10, as "the accuser of our brethren." We read of his accusations in the Book of Job (Job 1. 9-11; 2. 4, 5), probably the first book of Scripture to be written, and they continue up to the time recorded in this passage of the Revelation. Untrue, exaggerated or unfair accusations and criticisms of God's people are directly the work of Satan. Have you been one of his voluntary helpers in the past? One who is guilty of this sin surely needs to "recover himself out of the snare of the Devil" (1 Tim. 2. 26).

9. Our Lord said of Satan: "He is a liar, and the father of it" (John 8. 44). Lying is not mentioned as a "work of the flesh" in the comprehensive list of Galatians 5. 19-21. It is more directly

a "wile of the Devil." Peter said to Ananias: "Why hath Satan filled thine heart to lie to the Holy Ghost?" He also asked him: "Why hast thou conceived this thing in thine heart?" showing that, while Satan was the father and originator of the lie, Ananias was guilty of accepting his suggestion and carrying it out.

"White" lies, "business" lies, and all kinds of deceit are Satanic in origin and character. It is strikingly solemn to notice that, in the list of those who shall have their part in the lake of fire (Rev. 21. 8), other classes of sinners are merely mentioned, but of liars it is emphatically said: "*all* liars." This emphasis is twice repeated (verse 27 and chap. 22. 15).

10. One of Satan's devices is to transform himself into an "angel of light" (2 Cor. 11. 14) in order to deceive unwary children of God. In consonance with this, he often misquotes or misapplies Scripture for his own ends. An example of this is seen in his temptation of Christ in Luke 4. 10, 11. In quoting from the 91st Psalm, he omits the words: "in all thy ways" in the eleventh verse, and adds the words: "at any time" to the twelfth, thus subtly transferring the emphasis from the one verse to the other.

We must bear in mind that a text of Scripture plucked up by the roots from its context and misquoted or misapplied ceases to be the Word of God to us. It may be, as in the case cited, the word of the Devil.

11. Satan's first appearance in the Old Testament was as a "Higher Critic," insinuating that God had not really said what He did say. "Yea, hath God said . . . ?" is his first recorded utterance.

His first appearance in the New Testament is as a Unitarian, casting doubt on the Sonship of the

Lord Jesus: "If Thou be the Son of God . . . ?" is his first recorded utterance in the New Testament.

12. Another of his devices is to take advantage of an unforgiving spirit to cause trouble among the people of God (2 Cor. 10. 11).

13. He seeks to hinder the work of God by hampering the movements of preachers of the Word. Paul writes to the Thessalonians that he was in much anxiety on their account, and desired greatly to pay them a visit—"but Satan hindered us." What means he used to this end we do not know. When Paul "could no longer forbear" he sent Timothy to establish and comfort the Thessalonian Church, which shows that means of travelling thither were not wanting (1 Thess. 2. 17 to 3. 8).

These are some of the devices of the Evil One pointed out in the Word of God. We have now to consider how we are to overcome him and frustrate his devices.

* * * * *

The object for which our Lord Jesus came into this world is necessarily described under many different heads in Holy Scripture, seeing that His coming had such far-reaching purposes. On one occasion He said: "For this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth," and on another: "I am come that they might have life," and yet again: "I came down from Heaven . . . to do . . . the will of Him that sent Me." These and many other statements of the object for which He came into the world, though differing in themselves, do not conflict at all. They all form part of God's great plan of redemption and are mutually complementary.

One of the most striking of these statements is that in Hebrews 2. 14, 15: "Since then the children are sharers in flesh and blood, He also Himself in

like manner partook of the same, that through death He might bring to nought him that had the power of death, that is, the Devil, and might deliver all them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage" (R. v.).

This is further emphasised in 1 John 3. 8: "For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that He might destroy (or undo) the works of the Devil."

We have here two very plain statements to the effect that our Lord Jesus Christ came into this world in order to bring our arch-enemy to nought and to counteract his devices. Now, has He done this? Is it really an accomplished fact, on which we may confidently build?

Colossians 2. 14, 15 tells us that by His death on the Cross He despoiled "principalities and powers" (cf. Eph. 6. 12), "made a shew of them openly, triumphing over them in it."

His plan to bring to nought the Evil One "through death" and to destroy his works, has completely and for ever succeeded. His is not a barren victory, He has "triumphed gloriously." And as He triumphed, so God "causeth us to triumph." We are made partakers of the victory of Calvary. Such is the effect of that victory and such the value of the Atonement made, that it not only accounts for our past sin, ensures our present communion with God, and gives promise of all we need in the future (Rom. 8. 32), but, by reason of it, every believer in Christ may overcome the Evil One. He is a defeated foe. James tells us that, if we resist the Devil, he will flee from us (James 4. 7). "Our brethren" who are "accused day and night" by the Evil One are able to overcome him "by (because of) the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony" (Rev. 12. 11).

The Apostle John addresses Christian young men in the following words: "I have written unto you, young men, because ye are strong, and the Word of God abideth in you, and ye have overcome the Wicked One" (1 John 2. 14).

We learn here the method by which the victory that Christ accomplished on the Cross is applied to our advantage in our warfare against the Wicked One. It is as the "Word of God abideth in us" that we reap the fruits of Christ's victory.

Paul describes the "whole armour of God," in Ephesians 6. In it there is only one weapon of offence, "the Sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God" (verse 17).

This is the weapon our Lord used when tempted by the Devil in the wilderness. Three thrusts from the Sword of the Spirit put His crafty foe to flight.

Even the "little children" among God's people share in the blessed victory of our Lord over Satan. "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 John 4. 4).

One of the most remarkable and mysterious personages mentioned in the Old Testament is the royal priest Melchisedec. Our Lord Jesus is repeatedly said to be "a priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec" (Heb. 5 to 7). Of this man many things might be said, "hard to be uttered" (Heb. 5. 11), but there is one thing that Melchisedec did which even the most inexperienced Christian ought to be able to appreciate, a thing which helps us to see how our ever-faithful Lord and Saviour cares for us and plans for us to gain the victory over the wiles and temptations of the Devil.

The only occasion that Melchisedec comes on the scene is in the time of Abraham. Lot had gone to

live in Sodom, and when that city was sacked by a hostile army, he and his family were taken prisoners. Abraham his uncle, hearing of this, arms his trained servants, pursues the enemy and engages them with complete success. He recovers all the spoil and recaptures all the prisoners.

Here, at the height of his success, he is exposed to a subtle temptation. The king of Sodom comes forth to meet him. He only wishes to recover the captured citizens of Sodom; the entire spoil he intends to present to Abraham in recognition of his opportune services. What more congenial to Sodom's king than that the rich Abraham should follow his kinsman's example and make an alliance with him? Abraham had hitherto lived a life of separation from the inhabitants of the land, who were "wicked and sinners before the Lord exceedingly" (Gen. 13. 13). Here was a likelihood of a *rapprochement*, which might have been disastrous to Abraham's future spiritual history.

But there is another king hastening to meet Abraham. Melchisedek, priest of the most high God and king of Salem, reaches Abraham's party first, apparently only just before the king of Sodom arrives. He brings forth "bread and wine," and blesses Abraham thus: "Blessed be Abram of the most high God, possessor of Heaven and earth, and blessed be the most high God, who hath delivered thine enemies into thy hand."

Melchisedec withdraws. His work is done. He has turned Abraham's gaze from earthly things to "the most high God, possessor of Heaven and earth." The king of Sodom now comes forward and offers to "the friend of God" the spoil, the richest plunder of a sensuous, godless city. But Abraham is now ready to meet the temptation. The taste of

Melchisedec's bread and wine is still in his mouth, his words are still ringing in his ears, and Abraham, quoting them, says: "I have lift up mine hand unto the Lord, the most high God, the possessor of Heaven and earth, that I will not take from a thread to a shoe-latchet, and that I will not take anything that is thine, lest thou shouldest say, I have made Abram rich."

"After these things the word of the Lord came unto Abram in a vision, saying, Fear not, Abram, I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward" (see Gen. 14. 11 to 15. 1). He who had shielded him from the weapons of four kings and their hosts, was his all-sufficient reward. Who will compare all the treasures of Sodom with such a recompense?

This incident throws light on the mysterious statement, already referred to, that our Lord Jesus Christ is a priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec. From His view-point "at the right hand of God," He sees when this world's Prince approaches us, and, in order to arm us and strengthen us against the fascinating temptation which is on its way, He "maketh intercession for us." Who among the Lord's people has never experienced a time of special blessing and spiritual enlargement, just before an insidious temptation knocked at the door? Very often He uses the same emblems as Melchisedec and reminds us through the "bread and wine" that He who spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, is "possessor of Heaven and earth" and will "with Him also freely give us all things" (Rom. 8. 32).

A beautiful example of the work of our heavenly Melchisedec is seen in Luke 22. 31, 32. Our Lord, shortly before His passion, turned to Simon Peter and said: "Simon, Simon, behold, Satan hath desired

to have you, that he may sift you as wheat. But I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not, and when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren." The significance of this passage is often lost by a failure to observe exactly what our Lord said. "You" is, of course, plural, "thee" singular. Our Lord did not say that Satan had desired Peter particularly. (One grain of wheat cannot be "sifted.") He sought to encompass the downfall of the whole band ("you" plural). But our Lord, knowing the special temptation which awaited Peter, had made intercession for him in particular, that his faith should not fail. Peter apparently resented the implication that he was not as faithful as the others and declared his loyalty in very strong terms. This gives point to our Lord's tender probing of his conscience later on, when He asked: "Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou Me more than these?" and Peter's omission of the last three words in his reply (John 21. 15).

Our Lord's prayer for Peter was fully answered. His courage failed, his loyalty failed, but his faith did not fail, and Peter was happily restored.

This incident throws a beautiful light on our Lord's work of intercession for us. He is ever mindful of His own, and like Melchisedec, he anticipates special times of temptation and prays for us beforehand, "that our faith fail not." "Wherefore He is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by Him, seeing He ever liveth to make intercession for them" (Heb. 7. 25).

If Paul was led to make this prayer for the Thessalonians: "I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Thess. 5. 23), how comprehensive must be the intercessory prayers

of our Lord Himself! We gain a glimpse of His present intercession for us as we ponder the unfathomable beauties of His wonderful prayer for us ere He went into the Garden of Gethsemane to face the awful cost of our salvation (John 17; 18. 1).

* * * * *

We have now traced, in the Word of God, the teachings of the Holy Spirit with regard to the life of victory over the power of sin, and we have seen that in our Lord Jesus Christ is God's provision for every need of our soul. Through His Cross, His Word and His intercession we may overcome all the temptations of the World, the Flesh and the Devil.

Let us all, with deepest gratitude and willing acceptance of all that God gives in Christ, say from the heart, to His glory:

“THANKS BE TO GOD, WHO GIVETH
US THE VICTORY THROUGH OUR LORD
JESUS CHRIST!”

(1 Cor. 15. 57)

AMEN.

THE VICTORIOUS LIFE

God giveth us the victory—
O wondrous thought!
'Tis all of grace from first to last,
By Jesus wrought.
Thanks for God's Gift unspeakable
Of His dear Son,
In whom is the Eternal Life
On earth begun.

God giveth us the victory—
'Tis a free gift—
Not our own effort, but His power
That doth uplift
The trusting heart to heights above,
Where Christ doth reign;
And keeps us looking for Himself
To come again.

In Thee we triumph, Lord; in Thee
Rejoice and sing—
For all the crowns are on Thy brow,
And Thou art King.
Within our heart we Thee enthrone
Thy Name adore,
Jesus, pre-eminent art Thou
For evermore.

God giveth us the victory—
And day by day
He leadeth us in triumph on
By Christ alway;
'Midst many a conflict, sorrow, loss,
Tried and cast down;
Yet, "more than conquerors" by His Cross,
To win the crown.

God giveth us the victory—
We take it, Lord,
Surrendered in our helplessness
To trust Thy Word.
In faith we would begin to praise,
Believe, then see
That Thou dost give us here and now
Thy victory.

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