



MAP ♦ P.O. Box 128 ♦ 575 US Highway 250 ♦ Savannah, OH 44874 ♦ (419) 962-1515 ♦ September 2017

LIVING IN THE STRONGHOLD OF DECEPTION

Circumcision of the Heart

Part 3
of 8

Part three of an eight-part series called *Living in the Stronghold of Deception*.

If we don't allow the cross to work in our lives, the foreskin of our heart remains. This causes us not to see or understand God's ways. We then keep eating from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, and we stay in our worldly wisdom. Let me explain.

Under the Abrahamic covenant, every male child had to be circumcised on the eighth day. Why the eighth day? Eight represents new beginning. This represents the new covenant, which is the circumcision of the heart. Genesis 17:14 says, *The uncircumcised man child whose flesh of the foreskin is not circumcised, that soul shall be cut off from his people; he hath broken my covenant.*

Under the new covenant, which is Jesus Christ and Him crucified, there has to be the circumcision of the heart. If the work of Jesus Christ is not taking place in our lives, we will remain in the wisdom of this world and will be cut off from the blessings and understanding of

the wisdom of God. Faith that does not have these works will be a dead faith and will not please God. This faith will never fight the good fight, because it does not know how. It has no wisdom of God,



because our hearts are closed to this wisdom and will stay uncircumcised.

Jeremiah 31:33-34: *But this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; after those days, saith the Lord, I will put my law in their*

inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people. And they shall teach no more every man his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord: for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest of them, saith the Lord: for I will forgive their iniquity, and I remember their sin no more. This is confirmed in Hebrews 8:10-12. This is for us today.

In the early church, the believing Jews still wanted to put the old covenant into the new covenant. They wanted the circumcision of the old covenant, which was the cutting of the foreskin of the flesh, to continue in the new covenant, which is the circumcision of the heart. The two do not mix. You cannot mix law and grace. This was very new to them. You cannot put new wine into old wineskins.

How does this concern us? If we don't allow the work of the cross by the power of the Holy Spirit to work in us, we cut ourselves off from the new covenant (or cut ourselves off from Jesus Christ, who is the new covenant). We will continue in self-righteousness and in

all kinds of evil religious works, and in the end this will destroy us. It will bring to naught the living reality of the life of Christ in the church.

Now this circumcision of the heart is painful indeed. We don't like it; that is, our flesh doesn't like it. We were all born in sin and apart from God. We all fall short of the glory of God. Without the circumcision of the heart it is impossible to come into the glory of God. It is impossible to please God outside of the painful circumcision of the heart. Somebody might say that you make it sound so hard; yes, it is difficult if you fight against God's work. Romans 8:17-18: *And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together. For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.* If we allow that cutting to take place, we are dying the death of the flesh, and are being raised with Christ. This is truly the work of the cross in our lives. If we are true children of God, we will never get away from the cross or the work of the cross in our lives, which brings us into the full glory of God in this life and the life to come. This is God's purpose for our lives.

Jesus Christ is doing the work. He is the one saying to us, *There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit* (Romans 8:1). Let's bring this down to where you and I live. We are like the believing Jews who had a powerful experience of being born again. They recognized that Jesus is their Messiah, but they had to let go of the old

covenant and change their way of thinking. It was very hard for them to do that. In other words, the cross became a stumbling block to them because the Holy Spirit began to teach them, mostly through Paul, that all the law of the old covenant was completely fulfilled in what happened on the cross of Christ and was no longer applicable.

This was a hard pill to swallow. It became a stumbling block to them. So it is with us. Maybe we were raised in churches with many rules, laws, and ordinances. It was a part of us. Then when truth, light, and life came to us, we were offended, because we had to completely change our way of thinking.

In fact, it is impossible with man, but possible with God. Our fathers and forefathers were like this, and do we have to change our thinking? I was raised in a church with many rules, laws, and ordinances. I was born into it and grew up in it. It was a part of me and I was a part of it. It was unthinkable to own and drive an automobile or have electricity in our homes. The idea was to separate ourselves from the world. This is the work of an uncircumcised heart, comparable to eating from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

I had the born-again experience in my barn one night. I cried out to the Lord for help, because I was in such a miserable state. Everything changed for me. It was then I started experiencing the cross. At first, the work of the cross was a stumbling block to me. I had a choice: follow Christ or go back to all the rules and laws that couldn't save me. Somebody might say that would be an easy choice. If you have never been in

this situation, you don't know what it is like. It causes family divisions and you will be cut off from any family inheritances. You will be excommunicated from the church and shunned. The early Jewish believers were in this same situation. It is so easy to learn the Word of God with the natural mind, but when the working of the cross becomes a reality in our lives, it is a completely different ball game. You will be persecuted, mostly by religious people, just like the early church was. If we are not suffering some kind of persecution today, we need to examine ourselves to see if we are in the true faith. I'm not talking about arguments in the church. I'm talking about spiritual wickedness in high places coming against what God is doing in you and through you by the power of the cross through the Holy Spirit. Please read Galatians 4:21-31 with spiritual understanding.

Paul writes in Philippians 3:7-9: *But what things were gain to me [What was gain for Paul? It was the old Mosaic Law that showed people their sin, but could never bring them into this great salvation we have in Jesus Christ], those I counted loss for Christ. Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ, and be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith.*

I had to come into and am still coming into what Paul writes about in Colossians 2:11: *In whom also ye are circumcised with the circumcision made*

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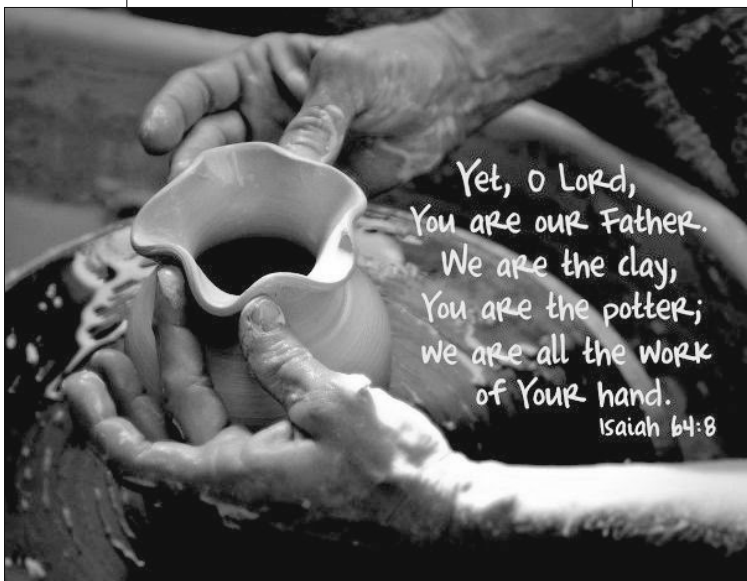
without hands, in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ. The laws I was trying to follow did not free me or keep me from sinning. Again, the law cannot free me from my sin nature. When Christ, by the power of the Holy Spirit, started to circumcise my heart by cutting away the flesh of my heart, I was set free to worship God in spirit and in truth. The sins of the flesh, which were produced by my sin nature, no longer had dominion over me. Romans 6:14: *For sin shall not have dominion over you: for ye are not under law, but under grace.* We have to know and understand that the cutting away of our flesh is a painful circumcision of the heart, because it costs us our lives. The grace of God cannot be understood except by the operation and understanding of the cross working in our lives.

This circumcision, or the work of the cross, becomes a reality in our lives. Grace is not given to the proud, but to the humble – to the one who allows this circumcision to take place. Today much grace is being preached, but it is not being understood because of the wisdom of this world. We leave the work of the cross out of it, and therefore it cannot be understood. It makes us feel good, but when it is tried by fire, it is no longer by feeling, but by truth.

What I am writing about doesn't come by head knowledge, but by walking with Christ in the Holy Spirit. It takes years of walking with Christ to start to understand this from the heart. Romans 2:29 tells us *circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God.* This costs us our lives. Young Christians, stay the course. I encourage you to stay with Jesus, who will never leave or forsake you. It may seem like He does,

because of all the training He does in you, but He never will leave you, for He loves you and has a great plan for your life, preparing you for the Master's use.

Yes, we have a choice to walk in our own way, our own understanding, and our own opinions – which will destroy us. Or we can walk the way of the Holy Spirit and be led by the Holy Spirit, which is God's way, and which in the end will be glory for us. Yes, Jesus will



be glorified in His saints (2 Thessalonians 1:10). My friend, this is the work of the Lord in us. Ephesians 2:8-10: *For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.* If we do not allow the circumcision of the heart to take place, it will be our workmanship. We will continue to boast in our keeping of laws and ordinances of self-righteousness, and in all kind of evil religious works, which in the end will destroy us. I have seen it happen many times in my own life and in the lives of others. May God deliver us from this evil, and it is very, very evil.

The work of the cross begins to change us into the image of Jesus Christ.

1 Corinthians 15:45-50: *And so it is written, the first man Adam was made a living soul; the last Adam [Christ] was made a quickening spirit. Howbeit that was not first which is spiritual, but that which is natural; and afterwards that which is spiritual. The first man [Adam] is of the earth, earthy; the second man [Christ] is the Lord from heaven. As is the earthy, such are they also that are earthy; and as the heavenly such are they also that are heavenly. And as we have borne the image of the earthy, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly. Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; neither does corruption inherit incorruption.*

After we, as corrupted human beings, have cried out to God and are born again, a work of God has to take place to bring us into incorruption, to bear the image of the heavenly, which is Jesus Christ and Him crucified. Why is this? It is so

the will of God will be done on earth as it is in heaven! My friends, this very thing has been given to the church, God's people, after God's ordained order and not after man's order. When we have done the will of God on earth as it is in heaven, and our time comes to enter the next life, corruption will put on incorruption in its fullness. We will never die. How does God bring us into this? We in our fleshly ways do not choose God's ways. Our heavenly Father deals with us as His children, to bring us into the image of His Son, Jesus Christ. We begin this intimate relationship with the Father through His Son Jesus Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit; yes, all three. We begin to hear His voice as we begin to walk with Him. We do have fellowship with the Father and His Son, Jesus Christ, and this is a glorious fellowship. Read John chapter 17. —D. Wickey

End

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1. **October 01:** Join us as counsellor/pastor/teacher/author **Bruce Lengeman** (author of *To Kill a Lion* — see the ad below) teaches on personal identity: discover the full value of who you are as God, the Creator, designed you to be.
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Join us for a live conference call on the first Sunday of every month at 8:00 P.M. EST.

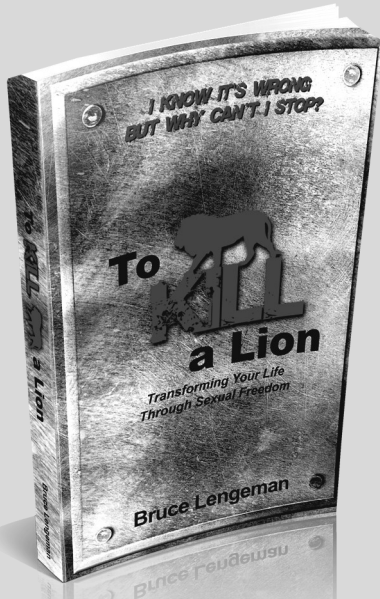
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The Power of Unity

—By Os Hillman

That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me. John 17:21

What is the greatest power that allows the unsaved to make a decision for Jesus Christ?

It isn't prayer, though this is important.

It isn't good deeds, though deeds indicate a fruitful relationship with God.

It isn't good behavior, though Christ commands us to be obedient.

The greatest power God's children have over darkness is unity. Jesus talked a great deal about His oneness with the Father and the importance of unity in the Body of Christ. It is the most difficult command Jesus gave to the Church, because it wars against the most evil aspect

of our sin nature-independence.

In the last days we are seeing God's Spirit convict His children of the lack of unity among His Church. We are seeing God move between blacks and whites, ethnic groups, denominations, and parachurch groups. There is much work to be done.

The walls of division and competition among His Body are a stench in God's nostrils. He sees the competition and the pride of ownership and weeps for the lost who cannot come to Him because they cannot see Him in His Body. When His Body is one, the unbelieving see that Jesus was sent by God. It is like a supernatural key that unlocks Heaven for the heathen soul. The key is in the hand of Christ's Church. When there is unity, there is power.

Scripture tells us 5 will chase 100, but 100 will chase 10,000 (see Lev. 26:8).

There is a dynamic multiplication factor in unity of numbers. We are a hundred times more effective when we are a unified group. Imagine what God could do with a unified Church.

Jesus prayed that we all might be one, as the Father and He are one. He wanted the same love God has for Jesus to be in each of us. When this love is in us, we are drawn to each other with a common mission. The walls fall down. The independent spirit is broken. Competition is destroyed. Satan's accusations are thwarted. Our love for each other is manifest to the world around us. Lost souls begin to seek this love that is so foreign to them.

A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another. John 13:34-35

Don't interrupt!

Author Unknown

Most people react badly to being interrupted. They often feel disrespected and small when you talk over them. People who tend to interrupt others generally do so for one of these reasons:

- ◆ They don't place enough value on what the other person has to say.
- ◆ They want to impress others by showing how smart or intuitive they are.
- ◆ They're too excited by the conversation to let the other person finish talking.

If you are in the habit of interrupting other people, examine your motives and determine to make a change.

- ◆ Give people the time they need to express themselves.
- ◆ Don't feel that one of you has to be speaking all the time.
- ◆ Periods of silence give you a chance to reflect on what's been said so that you can respond appropriately.

When I Say I Am Born Again

When I say...

"I am Born Again" I'm not shouting "I'm clean livin"...

I'm whispering "I was lost," Now I'm found and forgiven.

When I say...

"I am Born Again" I don't speak of this with pride...

I'm confessing that I stumble and need Christ to be my guide.

When I say...

"I am Born Again" I'm not trying to be strong...

I'm professing that I'm weak and need HIS strength to carry on.

When I say...

"I am Born Again" I'm not bragging of success...

I'm admitting I have failed and need God to clean my mess.

When I say...

"I am Born Again" I'm not claiming to be perfect...

My flaws are far too visible but, God believes I am worth it.

When I say...

"I am Born Again" I still feel the sting of pain...

I have my share of heartaches, So I call upon His name.

When I say...

"I am Born Again" I'm not holier than thou...

I was a simple sinner who received God's good grace, somehow.

—Maya Angelou

Feedback and Response Section

1

Yes, we do need that saving faith and understanding that we are washed in the blood and have our sins forgiven through our Lord Jesus Christ—to have our hearts renewed in Him daily and to feel the joy of the Holy Spirit!

Faith and works go together—like a rowboat needs oars to paddle downstream. Our plain way of living will not and cannot earn us brownie points to heaven, but it does keep me close to God! The confusion of the world is mind-boggling. How can the internet, TV, and cell phones be part of a peaceful life in all godliness (1 Timothy 2:2)? What a wonderful world this would be if people would spend half as much time with their Bibles as with their cell phones.

You can find any scripture or spiritual reading from the internet on your phone, but you can also indulge in porn! The devil has the last laugh! Sweet and bitter water cannot come from the same well! No, I cannot obtain my salvation through living a simple life, but I've learned over the years that endurance teaches us contentment and a joyful heart! And I do indeed experience the fruit of the Spirit in true peace and joy—while out on my patio on a beautiful spring morn running my laundry through the wringer wash machine, singing praises to my Savior, or plodding down a lonely country road with my horse and buggy, singing and meditating.

It is sad that so many Anabaptist churches no longer want to crucify their

flesh or carry their crosses in any way (that hinders them). Divorce is creeping in and the excuses are lame, but God's Word stands forever!

Yes, we may have some Amish that do not clearly understand the plan of salvation, but we have them in all churches. My prayer is that they may be enlightened with the Word and truth. We cannot always read their hearts, either. I have had experiences with people that I didn't know very well, and I with a judgmental heart, thought of them as not being very spiritual; but after having a conversation with them, I had a different view. Let us beware of this before we find ourselves judging another. Let us keep our eyes fixed on Jesus!
A.M.K.

Jeremiah Zeiset responds:

A.M.K., I'm delighted to hear of your personal walk with the Lord. We all need to be born again by faith in the Son of God before we can walk with the Lord. After the Lord removes the scales from our eyes at conversion, we are then able to live a life pleasing to the Lord.

Our churches are filled with people who are putting their hope in getting into heaven because they went to church, did or didn't do certain things, gave money to the church, etc. This isn't only true in Anabaptist churches, but is in churches all across America. The only solution is a new heart—to be born again by faith.

I do not think that denying technology keeps me close to God. While our lives were not busy with technology, work seemed to keep everyone busy from

morning to evening. The issue is the heart. The problem with focusing on the outward is that we tend to forget the heart. If religious leaders spent more time talking with individuals about their hearts and praying with them, then I think we'd see real, radical change in members. But instead, we do exactly what we're warned against in Colossians 2:20-22: *Wherefore if ye be dead with Christ from the rudiments of the world, why, as though living in the world, are ye subject to ordinances, (Touch not; taste not; handle not; Which all are to perish with the using;) after the commandments and doctrines of men?*

If the heart is corrupt, the whole body and mind is corrupt. If we struggle with lust, we will lust after the flesh whether we have a cell phone or not. If our hearts belong to the Lord, we will love Him

more than the things of the world and will despise sin whether we have a cell phone or not. This is my personal testimony, both before and after conversion. The Lord does an amazing work in our hearts if we allow Him to, literally giving us a new heart when we are born again.

Whether or not people are members of an Anabaptist church matters little to me. Please do not think our goal is to get people to leave the Anabaptist churches. As you said, there are many in Anabaptist churches who are indeed born again and are walking with the Lord. We wish to encourage those who believe, and want to share the Gospel with those who have not yet placed their faith in the only One who can save us and change us.

— Jeremiah Zeiset

End

2

Dear Friends, we have been receiving your little publication, *The Amish Voice*, for about a year. With a sad heart, we have taken note of the scornful title and misleading articles that are published. I have resisted the urging of my dear wife to send this notice much earlier, but it has gotten to the point that I can no longer disregard this misleading material coming into our home, and I feel sure that I will be successful in finding other materials to use to start a fire. So I request the removal of my name from your mailing list once and for all.

You have never given a hint of your denomination or where you stand, so, I, too, choose to remain obscure, but want you to know that I cannot walk together unless we be agreed. —Kentucky

Joe Keim responds: It seems clear from reading 1 Corinthians 3:4 that the church at Corinth was also bickering over which group they belonged to. The apostle Paul writes, "While one saith, I am of Paul; and another, I am of Apollos; are ye not carnal?"

Here we are, some two thousand years

later, and we still have a similar problem. If the Apostle were to write to us, he would probably say something along the lines of, "While one says, I am of the Old order; and another, I am of New Order ; I am of Schwartzentruber; are ye not carnal?"

Instead of learning from 1 Corinthians 3 , we have taken this idea of separation and division to a whole new level. If an un-churched individual were to try and figure out which denomination to join, he would likely become entirely frustrated with the mess we have made. Not only have we sliced and diced groups into denominations, but we have sliced denominations into sub-denominations and sub-sub-denominations. God help us! Have we not also become carnal and think and act just like the unbelieving world?

Someone recently said that finding the right church is like buying socks at Wal-Mart. You go to the section where socks are being sold and you find many colors, styles, brands, and prices. What at first seemed like an easy task suddenly turned into an overwhelming situation.

Jesus prayed in John 17:21: *That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me.*

The cry of Jesus has not changed in 2,000 years. He still wants us to be one as He and the Father are one. The truth is, we are not one and the world has noticed. While we bicker among ourselves, just like the Corinthians, the world scorns and laughs at us. They want no part of us.

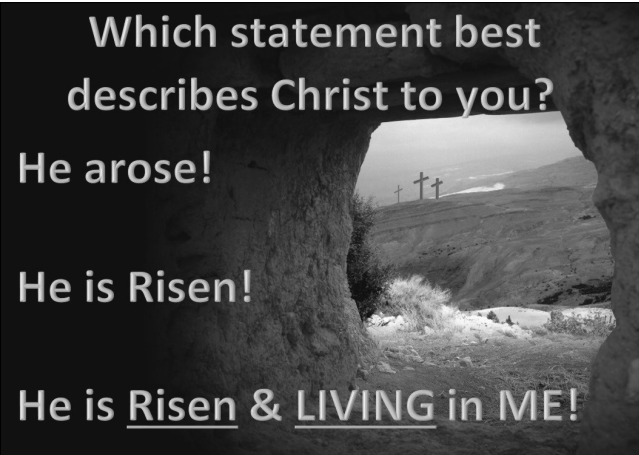
Someone might ask which denomination serves as the standard. Old Order? New Order? Schwartzentruber? Beachy? Tobe? Swiss? Weaver? Which one would you recommend I become part of so I can fulfill Jesus' request and be one with Him and the Father?

Does wearing the same pattern of clothing make us one? Does following the same color, the same routine, and the same measurements make us one? Exactly what did Jesus mean in John 17 when He prayed, "that they also may be one in us?"

-- Joe Keim

Wisdom and Fear

—by Paul Miller



We like to think of ourselves as wise. We like to think that we follow what is good and right. However, if we try to determine right and wrong based upon our feelings or our society, then we are foolish in God's eyes.

God has told us what true wisdom is. It is to fear Him (to reverence, respect Him; to submit to Him, realizing that He is in charge and His ways and Word are right). To understand is to know Him. Many people know about Him, yet do not know Him. To know Him, though, is to love Him — to love what He loves and to hate what He hates. *The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom: and the knowledge of the holy is understanding* (Proverbs 9:10). *The fear of the LORD is to hate evil* (Proverbs 8:13).

The fear of the LORD is to hate evil. Yet many claim to know God who also love and defend what God calls evil. We do not get to determine right and wrong. God does. If we cannot accept that what He calls sin is sin, then we do not really know or fear Him. We have set ourselves up as being above God. Are you wise in your own sight or wise in God's sight? —Paul Miller

What is the source of our justification?

Romans 8:6 says: *For to be carnally minded is death; but to be spiritually minded is life and peace.*

We can know whether we are living in the Old or the New Covenant by whether we are walking in life and peace. In the Old Covenant, the continual focus was; Do this, don't do that, and you will be accepted by God. This is called the "spirit of bondage" leading to fear (Romans 8:15). Fear, insecurity, condemnation, and discouragement are the fruits of trying to find acceptance with God with our own performance. No matter how sincere or diligent we are, this mindset will always lead to death. Our good will never out-weigh our bad. Any righteous works we do to make ourselves acceptable to God will always be repulsive to Him (Isaiah 64:6).

Justification (to be declared righteous by God) can only be achieved by accepting, by faith, what God has provided (Romans 5:1, Ephesians 2:8-9). Church membership won't do it. Confessing your sin to a priest won't do it. A fairly good life won't do it. Nothing and no one can make you righteous in God's eyes except Jesus, who is the payment for our sin. And not nearly everyone who knows and agrees with these truths has actually received God's justification by faith.

Sadly, I believe an enormous amount of people are just hoping things will turn out OK when they come before God. It won't work that way. If you haven't received God's justification on earth and lived by it (the just shall live by faith), then it won't be available for you on Judgement Day, either.



The normal life of a believer was intended to be a life of abundance and peace. This is available for all who will believe. There are many things the enemy will use to try and destroy it along the way, but in order to have life and peace, we must start where God starts. We must begin by throwing away all our false securities and trusting in Jesus alone. When this becomes established within us, we quit

trying to live the New Covenant life with an Old Covenant spirit.

Are you living in life and peace? Is your justification acceptable to God? ~ 1 John 1:9 says: *If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from ALL unrighteousness.*

Think about it! The justification God offers is so powerful that even the worst sinner can stand before an utterly holy God as though he had never committed a single sin his entire life! If that doesn't describe you, it can. Believe what God says in His Word, and you too can experience life and peace. **END**

Church Rules or No Church Rules

—By John Weaver

Is it God's will for churches to create rules and standards? I wonder if I am incredibly brave for asking this question. Maybe I am incredibly crazy. Or perhaps, I am a little bit of both.

I have actually thought a lot about questions regarding the church and making

rules. I finally felt that I should take an honest look and try my best to find the answer. Many of you have encouraged me and blessed me for searching. May we continue to be gracious toward each other, even if our opinions differ!

I think most, if not all, churches have at

least some standards. There are always lines in the sand that churches draw and would not cross. For example, many churches would not host a same sex marriage because they have an unnamed, unwritten standard that would not allow it.

**Continued
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I think about another example. Our church has a written bathroom policy (a very recent rule) brought about in our children's ministry, which involves children and young teens of all ages. Because what we assumed to be normal was challenged, we had to set a new policy. The new policy states that all boys must use the boys room, and all girls must use the girls room.

The types of rules that I want to look at today, however, are a little bit different. In my background, everyone was required to adhere to a long list of rules made by the church. In fact, adhering to the rules was the most important part of church life; nothing was stressed as being more important than keeping all the rules. This was sad indeed! Many groups have rules for daily living, but they do not place such a strong amount of importance on them.

What is God's heart and opinion regarding this matter? In the old covenant, God wrote his rules on tablets of stone. In the new covenant, on the other hand, God said that he wants to write His rules on our heart.

I remember reading in John about Jesus saying that He would go and send the Comforter, which is the Holy Spirit; He is here to guide us into all truth. I began to wonder after reading this passage, "Why do we then have rules to do what the Holy Spirit wants to do?"

Rules are very important in the home. Children need to be trained with rules and see a very clear authority structure with the father in charge along with his helpmate, the mother. Shouldn't the church be structured in the same way?

The church is called the "flock of God," "God's heritage," and "The Church of God." Jesus is said to be the head of the church and the Chief Shepherd. Therefore, the church belongs to Christ, and He is the authority over it.

It is important for us to realize that the church belongs to God and not the leaders. Some of us are called to oversee God's heritage, and we should take this calling very seriously. It is important that we do what God wants and do not take matters into our own hands, for we will give an account one day.

In Acts 15, we read about a church that faced this same issue. The Word of God was being preached to the Gentiles, an act which was formerly off limits. Once Jesus had died and shed His blood for everyone, the Gentiles began to be converted and were added to the church.

At this time, some from within the church got alarmed and said that if people wanted to be a part of the church, they had to keep the law, and they had to be circumcised. If a person refused to do these two things, he could not be saved. This controversy caused quite a stir!

Eventually, the elders and apostles came together to discuss things. In the end, Peter gave a speech declaring that believing Gentiles are purified by faith and are saved the same as other believers. He continued by asking, *Now therefore why tempt ye God, to put a yoke upon the neck of the disciples, which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear? (Acts 15:10)* Together, the church finally decided on four rules that they felt the Holy

Spirit would allow, none of which required being circumcised or keeping the law.

The whole point or lesson we can learn from Acts 15 is that rules are not meant to distract from the finished work that Jesus had accomplished. I believe that today, church leaders should take the same approach and have the same concerns.

Invariably, if we make up a list of rules to keep, the focus will soon be shifted to keeping the rules and will not focus on the complete and finished work of Jesus Christ in our lives. The more rules that are in the church, the higher the chances are that people will feel that they can accomplish merit with God by keeping the rules. Man naturally has this tendency, and before we know it, they are trying to accomplish what has already been accomplished.

Church leaders have a great responsibility to point people toward a relationship with Christ and to let the Holy Spirit guide them. It is not our job to be the Holy Spirit, yet I have seen many times when church leaders wanted to impose rules, not for God's benefit, but for their own benefit. In fact, one particular leader admitted to his error not long ago and confessed that he was being pressured by his peers.

I could write a lot more to this already lengthy post, but let us not be distracted from the simplicity that is in Christ. The more we add to the simple message of Jesus and His blood, which was shed for the whole world that believes, the more chances increase that the gospel will be distorted.

The apostle Paul wrote: *Who also hath made us able ministers of the new testament; not of the letter, but of the spirit: for the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life.* (2 Corinthians 3:6)

—John Weaver

END



As the world continues to turn its back on God, we want to take a look at what the future holds according to the One who is the Beginning and the End—God! We hope you enjoy and benefit from this series, courtesy of Middletown Bible Church. Follow along, fill in the blanks, and look up! May we all be ready for the return of Jesus Christ!

You will need a Bible for this lesson.

Heaven, Our Eternal Home

In this chapter we want to learn about the place where saved people will live forever. Where will you spend ETERNITY?

How Long is Eternity?

Just how long is forever? It is hard for our little minds to understand eternity and how long it is. But here is one illustration that might help:

Suppose that once every 1,000,000,000,000 years (every trillion years) a little robin flew from Jupiter to planet Earth, picked up in his beak one grain of sand, flew back to Jupiter, and deposited it on that planet. Try to imagine how long it would take that robin to deposit the deserts and seashores of the earth upon Jupiter. And when that little bird had completed his not-so-tiny task, eternity would not be one second older than when he first began!

Yes, the question "**Where am I going to spend eternity?**" is a very important one! And we do not have all of eternity to answer this question. We must make our decision NOW, during the years that we spend upon this earth. Those who decide to put their full trust in Jesus Christ will spend eternity in HEAVEN (John 3:18,36; Acts 16:31).

The Three Heavens

The Bible indicates that there are three heavens. In 2 Corinthians 12:2 we learn that Paul was "caught up to the _____ heaven." If there is a THIRD heaven, then there must also be a FIRST and SECOND heaven:

1) **THE FIRST HEAVEN** is that which can be seen in the daytime, where the birds fly and the clouds go by! This is the atmospheric heaven. Jesus said in Matthew 6:26, "Behold the _____ (birds) of the _____ (heaven)." See also Psalm 8:8 ("the fowl of the heaven").

2) **THE SECOND HEAVEN** is that which can be seen at night --the stars, the moon and the planets. This is the stellar universe with all of its billions of stars and galaxies! David referred to the second heaven in Psalm 8:3, "When I consider thy _____, the work of thy fingers, the _____ and the _____ which thou hast ordained."

3) **THE THIRD HEAVEN** cannot be seen by human eyes at all. The third heaven can only be seen through the eyes of *faith*. God describes this heaven to us in His Word and we *believe* what God says about this place, even though we have never seen it. The third heaven is the place where God the Father manifests His presence in a special way (see Matthew 6:9). The Lord Jesus is in the third heaven today (Hebrews 8:1; 9:24). Paul once visited the third heaven (2 Corinthians 12:2). This is the place where believers go when they die. The third heaven is also called "the heaven of _____" (Nehemiah 9:6). It is also called "P_____" 2 Corinthians 12:4 and compare verse 2). The third heaven is the H_____ (Luke 2:14) of all the heavens. In this chapter we want to study the third heaven, and when we use the word "heaven" we are thinking about the third heaven.

Heaven is a Real Place

Heaven is not some imaginary dreamland that does not really exist. Heaven is a real place. Jesus spoke about this real place in

John 14:2: *In my Father's house are many MANSIONS* [abiding places]: *if it were not so, I would have, told you. I go to prepare a _____ for you.* Jesus Christ taught His disciples that heaven was a real place!

Heaven is the Dwelling Place of God

Heaven is more than just a place. It is a place where God is: *Our Father, who art in _____* (Matthew 6:9). It is a place where God makes Himself known in a very special way. In John 14:3 and John 17:24 Jesus describes heaven by using three words: WHERE _____ AM! Heaven is where Jesus is! Jesus wants us to be where He is!

Today we are away from the Lord (He is in heaven and we are on earth), but someday believers will be *P _____ with the Lord* (2 Corinthians 5:8). The good news that Paul gave to the Thessalonian believers was this: *and so shall we ever* [always, at all times] *be _____ the _____* (1 Thessalonians 4:17). Of course we recognize that Christ is with believers and believers are with Christ in a spiritual sense (Hebrews 13:5), and we thank God that He is with us always (Matt. 28:20).

Heaven is more than just a PLACE. It involves a PERSON. Heaven would not be heaven without Christ. Heaven is where Christ is and we shall someday see Him and be with Him forevermore!

Think about your own home. Your home is more than just a place. Your home is more than just a house built out of wood, brick or stone. A home is a home because of the PEOPLE who live there (your Mom and Dad and sisters and brothers, etc.). Without these people it would not be much of a home. Without Christ heaven would not be heaven.

Jesus Christ Will Be the Center of Attention

Jesus Christ wants His believers to be with Him in heaven so that *they may _____ my glory* (John 17:24). When we get to heaven Christ will be the center of attention and *we shall _____ Him as He is* (1 John 3:2).

Fanny Crosby was a lady who was totally blind. She wrote the beautiful words to many of the hymns that we sing (such as "Blessed Assurance" and "To God Be The Glory"). Fanny once remarked that she was very thankful that she was blind. Those who heard her say this were very surprised but then she explained that she was thankful to be blind because the first Person that she will ever see will be her Savior. She was looking forward to going to heaven and seeing the One who died for her!

Read 1 Peter 1:8 carefully. Do believers see Christ today? _____ Today we walk by faith and not by sight. Our Saviour is in heaven and we are on the earth. Even though believers do not see their Saviour today, do they still rejoice with great joy (1 Peter 1:8)? _____ If we rejoice greatly today when we do not see Christ, just think how much more we will rejoice when we see Him face to face!

When we see Christ in heaven, His appearance will be a constant reminder to us of His great love for us. Christ's resurrection body still has the scars which He received from dying on the cross for us (see John 20:27). When we are in heaven and see the nail prints in His hands, it will be a reminder to us of how much He loved us. We will remember that He is the LAMB OF GOD who was sacrificed for us and who loved us so much that He was willing to die on the cross in our place. In the last two chapters of Revelation (chapters 21 and 22) the eternal home of believers is described. Can you find the verses in these two chapters which talk about the LAMB (the Savior who died for us)?

Revelation 21 _____

Revelation 22 _____

Things That Will Be Absent In Our Eternal Home

Thinking about the many things that will not be in our eternal home can help us learn what eternity will be like for the believer. There are many things that we are used on this sinful earth that will not be found then. Here are four verses that tell us about things which will not be found in our eternal home: Revelation chapter 21 verses 4,8,23,27. As you carefully consider these verses, make a list which contains all the things you can think of that will not be found in the eternal state (the first few are done for you):

Jails, drug stores, locks on houses, cemeteries, hospitals,

What Happens When a Believer Dies?

If you were to see a large bumblebee, you might be afraid of it. But if someone were to pull the stinger out of the bumblebee then you would no longer need to fear it. It would be harmless. It would have no power to sting you or harm you in any way. It would be a harmless ball of fuzz.

Death is like that bumblebee. Death was once a very fearful thing because it meant separation from God because of our sins. But the Lord Jesus Christ died for our sins and rose again in victory. Therefore

Cont. next page

Christ has removed the "STINGER" from death for every believer: *O death, where is thy _____? O grave, where is thy victory?* (1 Corinthians 15:55). For the believer death has no more sting and the grave has no more victory! It is like a harmless bumblebee. It cannot hurt us at all!

What did the Apostle Paul think about death? Did he think that death was some terrible loss or did he think that death was some wonderful gain (Philippians 1:21)? _____ Did Paul have a fear of death or did he have a desire to die (see Philippians 1:23)? _____ Remember, Paul was a believer and he loved Christ. Paul knew that death simply meant departing and being with _____ (Philippians 1:23). Paul knew that being *absent from the body* meant that he would be *present with the _____* (2 Corinthians 5:8). This is why Paul at the end of his life could say, *For I am now _____ to be offered* (2 Timothy 4:6). He was ready to die! He was ready to go home to heaven! He was ready to be in the presence of His Saviour! Soon Nero, the Roman emperor, would have Paul executed and his head would be cut off. But this did not matter because Paul was ready to go to his heavenly home! He was homesick for heaven!

In Luke 23:39-43, we learn about a criminal who was dying on a cross next to the Lord Jesus. This man knew that he was a guilty sinner, but he turned to Jesus in simple faith and said, *Lord, remember me* (Luke 23:42). Jesus then gave this man a wonderful promise: _____ *shalt thou be _____ Me in paradise.* A few hours later this man died (see John 19:32) but the moment he died he went to be **with Jesus!** For the believing sinner, death is not a terrible thing. It is a wonderful thing.

Will We Be On Earth?

Many have the idea that believers will spend eternity in heaven and will have no relationship to the earth. The Bible does not describe the eternal state in such a way. Revelation chapters 21-22 describe the eternal state. *And I saw a new heaven and a _____* (Revelation 21:1). Is the earth also mentioned in Revelation 21:24? _____

In connection with this "new earth" there will be a glorious city called the "_____ J _____" J _____" (Revelation 21:2) and "the H _____ J _____" (Revelation 21:10). This city is described in detail in these two chapters.

In Revelation chapters 21-22, can you find the following (give the chapter and verse)?

A street made of gold: _____

A river of water: _____ **A tree with twelve different kinds of fruit:** _____

To say that the eternal state will have nothing to do with the earth, is not correct. However, the new earth will be far different from the earth that we know today.

The Myth About Heaven

A myth is a made-up story that is not true. There is a myth about heaven which many people believe. Suppose you were to go up to unsaved people and ask them this question: "What kind of person goes to heaven?" What do you think they would say? Many of them would probably give you an answer like this: ***Good people go to heaven and bad people go to hell.*** Is this really true or is this a myth? Let's think about this carefully:

1) If only good people go to heaven, would there be any hope for sinners? _____ Would there be any hope for the criminal that we learned about in Luke 23:40-43? _____

2) Does the Bible give any hope for sinners (1 Timothy 1:15)? _____

3) If only good people go to heaven, then how many people would go to heaven according to Romans 3:12? _____

4) If bad people go to hell, then how many people would go to hell according to Romans 3:23 and Ecclesiastes 7:20? _____

5) According to John 3:16-18, who goes to heaven? _____ According to these same verses, who goes to hell? _____

God is populating heaven with sinners! God is saving sinners by His grace and preparing a place for them in heaven. Heaven will someday be populated with SAVED SINNERS! People do not get to heaven because they are good. People get to heaven because they have a GOOD AND PERFECT SAVIOUR!

How Would You Answer If God Should Ask?

Suppose you were to die and God were to say to you, "WHY SHOULD I LET YOU INTO MY HEAVEN?" What answer would you give? Suppose someone were to say to God, "Lord, You should let me into heaven because I have tried to live a good life and I have tried not to hurt anyone." Would this be a good answer? _____ Suppose someone were to say to God, "Lord, You should let me into heaven because I went to church every Sunday and I prayed and I read my Bible." Is this a good answer? _____ Write out what *your* answer to this question would be _____

Who should you thank for being able to go to heaven? Should you thank yourself or should you thank someone else?

If God were to give you what you really DESERVE (because of the way you have lived and the things you have done), would He give you HEAVEN? Why or why not?

What (or Who) is the ONLY WAY to heaven (John 14:6)?

Who is the ONLY DOOR to heaven (John 10:9)?

A Bright Future

In this set of notes we have learned about some of the things that will take place in the future. Some of the things that will happen are not very happy things: WARS, TRIBULATION, THE BEAST, THE FALSE PROPHET, THE DRAGON (Satan), THE FINAL REBELLION and HELL. These things make the future ahead appear very dark (like a big storm coming).

Cheer up! There is good news too! There is one thing that we know for sure! If you are trusting Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior, then YOUR FUTURE IS BRIGHT. God is your Father, Christ is your Savior, the Holy Spirit is your Comforter and Heaven is your home! You have a guaranteed future in

heaven! You could purchase a ticket and have a reserved seat at a ballgame. You know for sure that when you get to that ballgame there will be a seat for you because you paid for your ticket and you have the ticket as proof! So also the believer has a "ticket" (guaranteed entrance) to heaven that was paid for by Jesus Christ when He died on the cross. This is why Peter said that there is a place "reserved in _____ for _____" (1 Peter 1:4). The written salvation promises found in the Word of God are the proof of this (John 5:24; 6:35-37; 10:28-30, etc.).

Do you have a "ticket" to heaven? Is there a place in heaven reserved for _____? (write your own name).

If you are not sure about this, then contact us and we will try to help. They want you to be sure about heaven! They want you to know for sure that you are saved and that you will spend YOUR ETERNITY with the Lord Jesus Christ!

This concludes our study on this 15-part prophecy series.

Luke 21:27 And then shall they see the Son of man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. And when these things begin to come to pass, then look up, and lift up your heads; for your redemption draweth nigh.

Keep looking up!

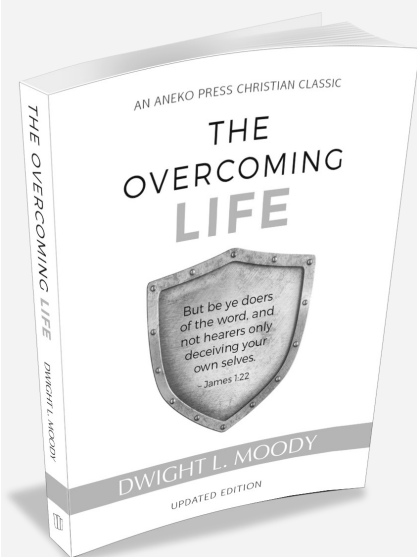
END

Overcome your greatest enemy – yourself

Are you an overcomer or are you plagued by little sins that easily beset you? Even worse, are you failing in your Christian walk, but refuse to admit and address it? No Christian can afford to dismiss the call to be an overcomer. The earthly cost is minor; the eternal reward is beyond measure.

Dwight L. Moody is a master at unearthing what ails us. He uses stories and humor to bring to light the essential principles of successful Christian living. Each aspect of overcoming is looked at from a practical and understandable angle. The solution Moody presents for our problems is not religion, rules, or other outward corrections. Instead, he takes us to the heart of the matter and prescribes biblical, God-given remedies for every Christian's life. Get ready to embrace genuine victory for today and joy for eternity.

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October

The Emotional Need for Love

Gary Chapman discusses the foundation of love in the relationship between parents and children.

Dealing with Loneliness

Loneliness is a devastating malady of our age. Jesus understands loneliness and has made provision to ensure that you can know Him, open your life to Him, and begin a never-ending relationship with Him.

Controlling Your Thoughts, Parts 1 and 2

If you want to overcome consuming negative thoughts of unforgiveness, pride, anger, or lust, you'll have to change the way you think. Charles Stanley explains that we must be intentional about dwelling on biblical truths and cultivating the mind of Christ in our daily thought life.

Eight Ways to Jump Off the Crazy Cycle

Join Emerson and Jon Eggerichs this week as they discuss eight ways to prevent and get off the Crazy Cycle. Learn to accept some trouble as normal, trusting in each other's goodwill, and learn how love and respect are two key ingredients in a successful marriage.

November

God's Design for Sexuality

Author and pastor Ray Ortlund joining Dennis Rainey of Family Life Today, says God was intentional when He made two distinct genders. He created us male and female not just for reproduction but for the whole purpose of love and romance. There also is great brokenness in this area.

Dealing with Depression

None of us are immune to depression. And if you're always burning the candle at both ends, frazzled and stretched too thin, you're a prime target for Satan's attacks. Hear Pastor Adrian Rogers of Love Worth Finding tell that even great men of God have struggled with depression.

Real Freedom, Parts 1 and 2

"Freedom" is often associated with the right to live as we please and pursue our dreams. However, Jesus spoke of a deeper aspect of freedom that pertains to the state of our souls. God wants to free us from every internal form of bondage that prevents us from becoming the person He created us to be. This kind of freedom is not achieved by war and revolution, but by the knowledge of truth in Jesus.

December

Fearfully and Wonderfully Made, Really?

Katherine and Jay Wolf talk with Dennis Rainey about the massive brainstem stroke Katherine miraculously survived just months after giving birth to their son.

The Five Pillars of Salvation

Have you ever considered what your salvation is resting upon? It has to withstand the world, the flesh, and the devil -and it has to last forever. Be fortified with this message from Pastor Adrian Rogers from Romans chapter 8.

How to Resist the Devil

Charles Stanley explains that James 4:7 says to submit to God and resist the devil. We can't truly submit to God unless we resist the devil, and we can't truly resist the devil unless we are submitted to God. These must be done simultaneously.

Never Quitting, Parts 1-3

Marked by grace and grit, Paul didn't know the meaning of quitting. Charles Swindoll shows that despite constant hardship, physical abuse, emotional anguish, verbal assaults, false accusations, unrelenting pressure, frequent misunderstandings, multiple imprisonments, and heartbreaking abandonment, Paul pressed on toward the prize of knowing Christ. Quit simply wasn't in the man's vocabulary. We ought to erase it from ours as well. And we can if we'll hear and heed Paul's last words to his friend, Timothy.

Overcoming, cont.
from back cover

*makes manifest the
savour of his
knowledge by us in*

every place (2 Corinthians 2:14).
Through Him, we will be more than
conquerors.

I wouldn't even think of talking to
unconverted men about overcoming the
world, for it's utterly impossible for them
to do so. They might as well try to cut
down the American forest with their
pocketknives. Unfortunately, many
Christian people make the mistake of
thinking that the battle is already fought
and won. They believe that all they have
to do is put the oars down in the bottom
of the boat, and the current will drift them
into the ocean of God's eternal love. But
we have to cross the current. We have to
learn how to watch, fight, and overcome.
The battle has only just begun.

The Christian life is a conflict and
warfare. The quicker we understand this
reality the better. There isn't a blessing in
this world that God hasn't linked Himself
to. God associates Himself with all the
great and higher blessings. When God
and man work together, there will be
victory. We are coworkers with Him. If
you take a water-powered mill and put it
forty feet above a river, there isn't
enough money in the world to make that
river turn the mill. Lower it about forty
feet and away it works. We need to keep
in mind that if we are going to overcome
the world, we must work with God. It is
His power that makes the way of grace
possible.

The story is told that Frederick Douglass,
the great slave orator, once said in a
mournful speech when things looked dark
for his race, "The white man is against
us, governments are against us, and the
spirit of the times is against us. I see no
hope for the colored race. I am full of
sadness."

Just then, a poor, old, colored woman
rose in the audience and said, "Frederick,

is God dead?" My friend, it makes a
difference when you count God in.

A young believer can often become
discouraged and disheartened when he
realizes this warfare. He begins to think
that God has forsaken him, and that
Christianity is not all that it claims to be.
Instead, he should consider it an
encouraging sign. No sooner has a soul
escaped from his snare than the great
adversary takes steps to ensnare it again.
He utilizes all his power to recapture his
lost prey. The fiercest attacks are made
on the strongest forts. The fierce battles
the young believer is called on to wage is
the evidence of the work of the Holy
Spirit in his heart. God will not desert
him in his time of need any more than He
deserted His people of old when they
were hard-pressed by their foes.

The Only Complete Victor

*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). The only man that ever
conquered this world – as the complete
victor – was Jesus Christ. When He
shouted on the cross, *It is finished!* it was
the shout of a conqueror. He had
overcome every enemy. He had met sin
and death. He had met every foe that you
and I will ever meet, and came through as
the victor. If I have the spirit of Christ, if
I have that same life in me, then I have a
power greater than any power in the
world. It is with that same power I
overcome the world.

Notice that everything human in this
world fails. Every man, the moment he
takes his eyes off God, fails. Every man
has been a failure at some period of his
life. Abraham failed. Moses failed. Elijah
failed. Consider the men that have
become so famous and were so mighty.
The moment they took their eyes off
God, they became weak like other men.
It's a very strange thing that those men
failed on the strongest point of their

character. I suppose it was because they
were not on guard. Abraham was noted
for his faith, but laughed when God told
him he and Sarah would have a child.
Moses was noted for his meekness and
humility, but he failed when he got angry.
God kept him out of the Promised Land
because he lost his temper. I know he was
called the servant of God, and that he was
a mighty man, and had power with God,
but humanly speaking, he failed, and was
kept out of the Promised Land. Elijah
was noted for his power in prayer and for
his courage, yet he became a coward. He
was the boldest man of his day. He stood
before Ahab, the royal court, and all the
prophets of Baal. Yet, when he heard that
Jezebel had threatened his life, he ran
away to the desert. Under a juniper tree,
he prayed to die. Peter was noted for his
boldness, and a little maid scared him
nearly out of his wits. As soon as she
spoke to him, he trembled and swore that
he didn't know Christ. I have often said
to myself that I'd like to have been there
on the day of Pentecost, alongside that
maid, when she saw Peter preach.

I suppose she said, "What has come over
that man? He was afraid of me only a few
weeks ago. Now he stands up before all
Jerusalem and charges these very Jews
with the murder of Jesus."

Triumphs of Faith

Now, how are we to get the victory over
all our enemies?

This article was taken from the
book, **The Overcoming Life** — by
D. L. Moody. In the coming months,
we will be printing each chapter,
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pages 4 and 14!

The Overcoming Life

—By D. L. Moody

Part 1: The Christian's Warfare

For whatsoever is born of God overcomes the world; and this is the victory that overcomes the world, even our faith. Who is he that overcomes the world, but he that believes that Jesus is the Son of God? (1 John 5:4-5)

When a battle is fought, we are anxious to know who the victors are. In these verses, we are told who will gain the victory in life. When I was converted, I made a mistake. I thought the battle was already mine, the victory already won, and the crown already in my grasp. I thought the old things had passed away, and all things had become new. I incorrectly believed that my old, corrupt nature, the Adam life, was gone. However, I found out, after serving Christ for a few months, that conversion was only like enlisting in the army. There was a battle taking place and if I was to receive a crown, I had to work for it and fight for it.

Salvation is a gift, as free as the air we

breathe. It is obtained like any other gift, without money and without price. There are no other terms. *But to him that does not work, but believes in him that justifies the ungodly, the faith is counted as righteousness (Romans 4:5).* But on the other hand, if we are to gain a crown, we must work for it. *For no one can lay another foundation than that laid, which is Jesus the Christ. Now if anyone builds upon this foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble, the work of each one shall be made manifest, for the day shall declare it because it shall be revealed by fire; the work of each one, whatever sort it is, the fire shall put it to test. If the work of anyone abides which he has built thereupon, he shall receive a reward. If anyone's work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss, but he himself shall be saved, yet so as by fire (1 Corinthians 3:11-15).*

We see clearly from this that it is possible to be saved, and all our works burned up. It's possible for us to have a wretched, miserable voyage through life, with no

victory, and no reward at the end. I am saved, yet as by fire, or as Job puts it, with *the skin of my teeth (Job 19:20)*. I believe a great many men will barely get to heaven, just as Lot escaped Sodom. They will be burned out with nothing left. Their works and everything else will be destroyed.

When a man enters the army, he's a member of the army the moment he enlists. However, he is just as much a member as a man who has been in the army ten or twenty years. But enlisting is one thing and participating in a battle is quite another. Young converts are like those who just enlisted.

It's foolish for any man to attempt to fight in his own strength. The world, the flesh, and the devil are too much for any man. We will gain the victory over every enemy if we are linked to Christ by faith, and He is steadily formed in us. It is believers who are the overcomers. *Now thanks be unto God, who always causes us to triumph in the Christ and*

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