

CHOOSING THE VICTORY



“Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and why art thou disquieted within me? hope thou in God: for I shall yet praise him, who is the health of my countenance, and my God.” -Ps 42:11

“For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world: and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith.” -1 John 5:4

A fundamental lesson for Christian maturity is the resignation that we never have a right nor a reason to "lose the victory," or to allow ourselves to be self-absorbed. We, as Christians, should never be downcast, discouraged, or otherwise discontent. Yes, we may grieve, we may weep, or even be angry (not sinful anger), but this range of emotions does not necessarily constitute the "victory" or the lack thereof. In fact, the spiritual victory may demand that we display all these emotions. What then is the victory and how might it be defined?

Choosing the victory is to willfully maintain a cheerful, thankful, teachable, and submissive attitude in the face of adverse or difficult circumstances.

The spiritual man is always aware of the eternal truth expressed in...

Romans 8:28 And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.

Some may question the importance of this concept but I believe it is vital to maintaining a consistent and Biblical testimony. Nothing is more grievous and revolting than unhappy and disgruntled Christians who use the worldly lies of psychology to excuse their selfishness (depression, bi-polar, ADD, manic, etc.). Such testimonies bring a terrible reproach upon Christ. Furthermore, whenever we

refuse to maintain the victory we place our petty agenda above the gospel of Christ. Remember, self-denial is the first principle of discipleship.

*Matthew 16:24 Then said Jesus unto his disciples, **If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me.***

Why is losing the victory so reprehensible? Because, as Christians, we are to perfectly represent God. And we know that an attribute of God is His unchanging character: He never loses the victory nor is He moved by circumstances.

Malachi 3:6 For I am the Lord, I change not...

Hence, we pervert and disgrace the character of God when we, as Christians, lose the victory. It's that poor, blind, miserable sinner who sulks when he fails to get his way or is otherwise disappointed. Not that blood-washed, Spirit-filled pilgrim who is a stranger in this world and has been delivered from the power and bondage of selfishness. To lose the victory is a sure sign of yielding to the old, carnal nature: when we refuse the victory we empower and resurrect the old man. However, the Bible teaches the Christian is to maintain a countenance of joy and contentment. That sad, sullen, despondent, and hopeless spirit is never the fruit of the Holy Ghost. Now, our countenance is not merely our outward appearance, as some suppose, though it may include body language. It is the spiritual air we project with the totality of our being and it cannot be masked with a mere outward religious cloak. Now, the decision to gain the spiritual victory is rooted in our will. As Christians we know that love is not an emotion, nor is it dictated by our feelings or circumstances. Likewise, maintaining spiritual victory is a commitment to contentment in godliness.

1 Thessalonians 5:16 Rejoice evermore.

This literally means at all times and in every situation we, as Christians, should be cheerful. God has not commanded us to do the impossible. Yet, such a command seems unreasonable from a human standpoint. How then are we to do this? Simple, Philippians 4:4 gives us our answer...

Philippians 4:4 Rejoice in the Lord alway: and again I say, Rejoice.

The choice is ours to make and it is expressed throughout the Bible...

In the law God tells us we can choose between life and death...

Deut. 30:19 I call heaven and earth to record this day against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing: therefore choose life, that both thou and thy seed may live...

Many times the Psalmist speaks of choosing God's way...

Psalm 119:30 I have chosen the way of truth: thy judgments have I laid before me.

Psalm 119:173 Let thine hand help me; for I have chosen thy precepts.

The wise man of Proverbs reveals the tragedy of wrong choices...

Proverbs 1:29 For that they hated knowledge, and did not choose the fear of the Lord...

Proverbs 3:31 Envy thou not the oppressor, and choose none of his ways.

The Prophet Isaiah spoke of the holy remnant of Israel as those who...

Isaiah 56:4 ...choose the things that please me, and take hold of my covenant...

Jesus rebuked Martha but commended Mary for their choices...

Luke 10:42 But one thing is needful: and Mary hath chosen that good part, which shall not be taken away from her.

So, let none suppose that our spiritual victory is a product of circumstance, whim, or chance. It is we alone, who choose or reject the victory. In this article, I want to point out four categories that represent any and every form of adversity or difficulty we could face

as Christians and remind us that in these circumstances we are to choose the victory.

WHEN WE ARE BEING TEMPTED

1 Peter 1:6 Wherein ye greatly rejoice, though now for a season, if need be, ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations...

Rejoice: (Greek) *ag-al-lee-ah'-o*, To jump for joy, to be exceeding glad.

1 Peter 4:12-13 Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you: But rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings; that, when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy.

Rejoice: (Greek) *khah'ee-ro*, To be cheerful, or calmly happy.

When we face temptation and testing our faith is being strengthened. The true child of God understands the greater end.

James 1:2-4 My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations; Knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience. But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing.

He recognizes, as a Christian, that his future usefulness has greater priority than his present comfort.

James 1:12 Blessed is the man that endureth temptation: for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him.

We pray, "Lord make me into a vessel of honor, use me, purge me from all that's not Christ!" Then when areas of our lives are exposed in the light, we quickly run back to the darkness. The Christian is blessed, or happy, when tested or tempted because he knows that a proper response will ultimately conform him to Christ.

1 Peter 1:7 That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than

of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ...

This brings the highest pleasure to the Christian. Rather than concentrating on the test or temptation his focus is on the person of Christ so as to overcome. Many are snared by the enemy during seasons of temptation as they bemoan their situation instead of drawing nearer to Christ. If we are preoccupied with the test instead of enamored with Jesus we are destined to fail. In times of temptation and testing we must choose the victory. And the victory can always be found when we take the narrow way of escape...

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

WHEN WE PRACTICE SELF-DENIAL

Matthew 6:16-18 Moreover when ye fast, be not, as the hypocrites, of a sad countenance: for they disfigure their faces, that they may appear unto men to fast. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward. But thou, when thou fastest, anoint thine head, and wash thy face; That thou appear not unto men to fast, but unto thy Father which is in secret: and thy Father, which seeth in secret, shall reward thee openly.

When we practice self-denial for the kingdom's sake let us do so with joy. This principle applies to many facets of the Christian life. Whether we are fasting, praying, witnessing, attending church, or serving others it all involves self-denial. Let us choose the victory as we fulfill our spiritual obligations lest we bring a reproach upon Christ.

Proverbs 15:13 A merry heart maketh a cheerful countenance: but by sorrow of the heart the spirit is broken.

There is nothing more grievous than people who look like they're being afflicted just to attend church. Sometimes I've been to church and it looks like folks have been "eat'in briars and been baptized in

lemon-juice." May we keep our eyes on Jesus and maintain a thankful and joy-filled spirit.

WHEN WE FACE TRIBULATION

Luke 21:28 And when these things begin to come to pass, then look up, and lift up your heads; for your redemption draweth nigh.

In Luke 21, Jesus details conditions just before His return. He addresses circumstances as diverse and tragic as deception, war, rebellion, hunger, disease, persecution, betrayal, fear, distress, and perplexity. So, this exhortation in verse 28 covers almost an endless list of adverse conditions. If we're not to be of this world why do we so often allow worldly circumstances to drag us down? The key, I believe, can be traced to our thought life. The enemy loves to torment us. To do this, he often cites our circumstances by introducing to our thought process situations of potential trouble. Satan often has us meditating upon fantasy as reality: what might happen, what someone might have said/thought. We must learn to be cognizant and discerning regarding our thought life. Such run-away thoughts are spiritually counterproductive at best, destructive and sinful at worst. I had to learn the lesson the Psalmist spoke of in...

Psalm 56:3 What time I am afraid, I will trust in thee.

Psalm 56:11 In God have I put my trust: I will not be afraid what man can do unto me.

We must keep our minds focused upon Christ.

Isaiah 26:3 Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee: because he trusteth in thee.

No matter what our situation we must not allow our minds to drift from the truth of Scripture.

Philip. 4:8 Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things.

Let us keep the victory during times of trouble.

Psalm 71:14 But I will hope continually, and will yet praise thee more and more.

WHEN WE ARE CHASTENED

Hebrews 12:11-14 Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby. Wherefore lift up the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees; And make straight paths for your feet, lest that which is lame be turned out of the way; but let it rather be healed. Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord...

We are exhorted to receive chastisement from the Lord and avoid two attitudes of heart: "despise not" nor "faint."

Hebrews 12:5 And ye have forgotten the exhortation which speaketh unto you as unto children, My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of him...

If we are not to despise nor faint under correction that only leaves one option, we must get the victory. In this hour, no one wants to be corrected. Pride, offense, and defensiveness when facing correction is the root cause of much lost victory.

Proverbs 13:10 Only by pride cometh contention: but with the well advised is wisdom.

In this church it is often the case.

We should avoid reacting to correction as Cain, who was of the wicked one, in Genesis 4...

Genesis 4:5-7 But unto Cain and to his offering he had not respect. And Cain was very wroth, and his countenance fell. And the Lord said unto Cain, Why art thou wroth? and why is thy countenance fallen? If thou doest well, shalt thou not be accepted? and if thou doest not well, sin

lieth at the door. And unto thee shall be his desire, and thou shalt rule over him.

In God's love, He will seek to correct us when we are wrong (wrong actions, wrong spirit, and wrong notions/opinions). It is impossible for us to gain the victory when we continue to maintain that our position, whether action, spirit, or opinion, is right. We may recall the rich, young ruler, who was rebuked by Jesus, as a true example of this attitude of heart.

Mark 10:22 And he was sad at that saying, and went away grieved: for he had great possessions.

Rejecting the chastisement of the Lord will indeed produce a sorrow, but not a godly sorrow.

2 Cor. 7:10 For godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation not to be repented of: but the sorrow of the world worketh death.

A sorrow laced with a repulsive self-pity that is more grieved with correction than the opportunity for spiritual growth it provides. Such a spirit always produces a disgruntled, downtrodden spirit because we set ourselves against God and there is no victory outside and opposed to Christ. We cut ourselves off from grace as God "resisteth the proud." This is an easily recognizable condition but I marvel that men will often deny they've lost the victory when it's obvious to everyone.

James 3:14-15 But if ye have bitter envying and strife in your hearts, glory not, and lie not against the truth. This wisdom descendeth not from above, but is earthly, sensual, devilish.

But a righteous man recognizes the spiritual value in reproof. He can choose the victory because he will always submit to the truth.

Job 13:15 Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him: but I will maintain mine own ways before him.

Psalms 141:5 Let the righteous smite me; it shall be a kindness: and let him reprove me; it shall be an excellent oil...

First, let us conclude: no matter our circumstances we must choose the victory in Jesus. Secondly, let us purpose to willfully maintain a cheerful, thankful, teachable, and submissive attitude in the face of every adverse/difficult circumstance. We will do this as we establish the godly habit of always bringing every burden to Christ.

Psalm 61:2 From the end of the earth will I cry unto thee, when my heart is overwhelmed: lead me to the rock that is higher than I.

–B.W.