

## LIVING VICTORIOUSLY FOR CHRIST

*Please read Romans 6.*

This chapter of Romans is just part of a major section of the epistle, which really commences at chapter 3 and continues to the end of chapter 8. In these chapters the various stages of our Christian lives are expounded and developed, and the major doctrines underlying them are wondrously and meticulously unfolded. These basic doctrines are of course justification by faith, sanctification and emancipation (both being wrought by the Holy Spirit), and of course final glorification.

Our new born regenerate life begins with a death to sin, and it is this vital point with which we are primarily concerned here in chapter 6.

It is a well-known fact amongst believers that we are saved by sovereign grace i.e. it is the free gift of God. This then should result in a desire to live a life of holiness unto the Lord, which of course is commanded in scripture. As well as that, at the moment of our conversion we are credited with the righteousness of our Lord Jesus Christ and are given a new nature, i.e. the divine nature with which to pursue this path of holiness. In our reading, Paul expresses the process like this:-

“Know ye not that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? Therefore we are buried with Him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection: knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin. For he that is dead is freed from sin.”

What Paul is saying here is in fact – by the operation of the Holy Spirit being given unto us – after the initial act of justification in which by the decree of God we are declared “no longer guilty” we are united to Christ or “in Christ” on a spiritual level. Therefore as He died in our stead (or if you like, as our proxy) and also rose again for us, having buried all our sins in the deepest ‘sea of God’s forgetfulness’, all the merits and attainments of His once and for all vicarious sacrifice for us are applied to us individually. Thus we become new creatures in Christ and fitted to serve Him in holiness of living because of our new nature, or as the apostle puts it, the “new man” is created by God “in righteousness” and

therefore cannot sin. We can then say with Paul in the next chapter, “I delight in the law of God after the inward man” (Rom. 7 v 22). This is the greatest possible evidence of our having become true believers.

We could now say, “so far so good”; but alas, many earnest believers, before they travel very far along the Christian highway, are confronted with an experience which, apart from a thorough understanding of these verses, they will be completely at a loss to understand. At this stage, several attributes of the old nature begin to reappear on the surface, and land the new creature in Christ into a state of bewilderment. As a new creature, the believer still in his inmost being wishes to proceed along his new pathway but is prevented from doing so with complete freedom by the downward thrust of subtle temptation, pride, self-righteousness, or evil thinking. Thus there is an inward conflict going on. This is the common experience of all believers including the saintly apostle Paul himself. He expressed it thus: “If then I do that which I would not, I consent unto the law that it is good. Now then it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me... For the good that I would that I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do.” If you read Chapter 7 from verse 14 onwards, from which I have quoted a part, you will find there that Paul found this a very major struggle.

The answer to this state of affairs is simply that although we receive a new nature at the time of our conversion, the old nature nevertheless remains. Thus the conflict between the old and new nature begins immediately after conversion and continues unto the end of our pilgrimage here on earth. If this were not so, there would be no necessity for the apostle to describe – as he does elsewhere in his epistles – the Christian life in terms of warfare, striving, running a race. It is doubly important that every believer in Christ fully understands this inevitable struggle that he will encounter; otherwise, he may very well and understandably doubt the reality of his regeneration. The conflict goes on and the battle rages but we must look out for it at special times. How necessary it is to be on our guard at times of spiritual prosperity. In the same way as a pirate will not attack an empty ship nor a thief an empty house (devoid of valuables, that is) so Satan is likewise ready to attack when he feels he can deprive us of some spiritual enrichment. Also in times of devoted service to our master, temptations to envy, flattering, and pride will ensnare us. We are so made that even the very best of our service is tainted with a spirit of self-satisfaction. The hymn writer Harry Twills was not very far wrong when he wrote: “And they who fain would serve thee best, are conscious most of wrong within.”

Having thus discovered that we still have an evil nature, the question that naturally arises now is:- Is there any possible way of victory over this indwelling sin? The answer is very definitely YES, and it is of course in none other than in Lord Jesus Christ Himself and in what He has achieved on our behalf. Through our faith-union with Him, we already share His Victory on Calvary and, as we have already seen, we are partakers of His Divine nature and inheritors of the eternal kingdom. Everything ultimately depends on this. There is not a thing we can do to improve our old nature, which is already condemned.

In order to gain victory in our earthly pilgrimage, the apostle indicates three major factors in the chapter which we are looking at: three practical exhortations, which if properly appropriated should lead every true hearted believer to a level of victorious Christian living and service. They are first, Knowing (v6), second, Reckoning (v11), and third, Yielding (v13 & v19). Let us now look at these one by one.

## **Knowing**

“Knowing this, that our old man was crucified with [Christ], that the body of sin might be destroyed” (v6). This is a matter about which all Christians should have absolute certainty – the certainty of faith. Now we must consider: what is implied by the term, the “old man”? In answer to this, we must be careful to differentiate accurately between the ‘old man’ and the ‘old nature’. If we look again at our text we see that it is our old man that was crucified, not our old nature – hence our struggle with it throughout our earthly life. The old man is the old humanity which all of us inherited from Adam: the creatures we all were from natural birth. That is what has been crucified. Our carnal nature with all its propensities is still there, but the old man has gone and gone for ever. And as no charge can be brought against a dead man, so we are eternally delivered from sin’s reward and as Christ now lives unto God we also in Him have been translated to a new sphere of life and are already seated in Heavenly places in Christ (Eph. 2 v 6).

Failure to grasp this important truth about the old man as distinct from the old nature has led to a great deal of despondency, frustration and distress among many sincere people of God. They go to all sorts of lengths to deal with the old man themselves, but alas to no avail, not realizing that it is the Cross of Christ which exterminates the old man, not any action or resolution on the part of the believer. They fail to see their identification with a dead, risen and triumphant Christ.

## Reckoning

“Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord. Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof” (vv11-12). This directive follows on in a perfectly logical sequence from knowing. We REALIZE. This implies the idea of contemplation or turning over in our minds continually the great transaction that has taken place within us; and appropriating our association with Christ and His atonement, and its impact upon us. It could also convey the idea of conclusion i.e. we could say to ourselves, “when sin attacks us from within let us draw the conclusion that we are dead to it through our crucifixion with our Lord.” Thirdly it conveys certainty, in the manner in which Abraham of old was certain of God’s promise to Him and Sarah that even at their very advanced ages they would have a son. This would of course be inconceivable in the natural way, but Abraham took God at His word and it was so. We too therefore must treat this statement of God’s word in like manner.

RECOGNISE. Not only are we dead unto sin but we are alive unto God. The resurrection life, which we now partake of, not only releases us from the tomb of death but also exalts us to the throne of glory – the life which set Jesus at God’s right hand. This makes us the recipients of many of God’s richest blessings. We are no longer under His wrath – through Jesus we are reconciled, are now in His favour and the objects of His love and concern but also subject to His chastening – not His wrath – if we fall into sin. There are certain blessings of God which are given to all and sundry, but the exceeding great and precious promises and all things that pertain to life and godliness, about which Peter writes, are ours only. To be alive unto God also means having a share in His purposes which are being worked out in and through us. Paul asserts, “I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me” (Phil. 4v18). God’s ultimate purpose is to make us holy. Such are the blessings of being alive unto God.

REJECT. We come now to the first practical application of all that has gone before in the entire chapter. One practical result of our old man being crucified is “that the body of sin might be destroyed” verse 6, and in verse 12 Paul says, “let not sin reign in your body”. Here he goes further and points out that our body is the place where sin continues to dwell and the vehicle in which it continues to operate. The phrase “the body of sin” literally means what it says – our bodies – and when Paul says “destroyed”, he means rendered inoperative or powerless. When

confronted with Satan's wicked charms and alluring enticements, we must reject with a firm NO.

**RESIST.** The second outcome of our old man being crucified with Christ is that we should not serve sin and of course that entails a firm resistance to any temptation to do so. "Resist the devil and he will flee from you", writes James, and he continues, "Draw nigh to God, and He will draw nigh to you"(James 4 vv7-8). Throughout this chapter the apostle is reflecting the absurd supposition, "Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound?" In reply Paul emphatically counters, "How shall we that are dead to sin live any longer therein?" No doubt the assertions of our sinful nature will assail us and wicked thoughts will flash across our mind, but all this has no rightful place in our lives now as Christians and therefore we must place them where they belong, at the cross. All the time we must keep driving in the stakes, keeping all things pertaining to our old nature firmly crucified. This death to self in this total resistance to sin is not an easy lesson to learn, but it is one with which we must all come to terms if we would desire to live holy lives in Christ our Lord. Nevertheless by the power of the Holy Spirit we are given the ability to resist. We are not free to sin, but free – not to sin.

### **Yielding**

"Neither yield ye your members as instruments of unrighteous unto sin: but yield yourselves unto God, as those that are alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness unto God" (v13). Here again is a logical follow up to what has gone before. If we yield our members, i.e. parts of our body, constantly to God, we will constantly experience victory over indwelling sin and make further progress in the Lord's service. We must however obey from the heart, and, if it is right, we are well on the way.

### **Conclusion**

We are no longer slaves to sin, servants to uncleanness or iniquity, and no longer under sentence of death. We now know that our old man has gone, we reckon ourselves dead unto sin, and having yielded ourselves entirely to the Lord, we attain to holiness and in the end we have eternal life.

"Thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Cor.15 vv 5-7). Amen.