

## #244 "Through Christ, We Overwhelmingly Conquer"

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*"But thanks be to God, who always leads us in triumph in Christ, and manifests through us the sweet aroma of the knowledge of Him in every place." -2 Corinthians 2:14*

One of the main thrusts and core passions of Relevant Bible Teaching is the emphasis on revealing the wonder, the power, and the freedom that comes in being one with Christ as we abide in Him and as we are indwelt by Him. Though it is true that God is omnipresent, we often forget that He has chosen to make His home in our hearts (John 14:23). He is near, close, real, and highly relevant in terms of the course of our lives and the spiritual power needed for spiritual conquering. Romans 8:37 says, "But in all these things we overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us." Paul's emphasis in Romans 8 is that there is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. Death has no victory, for Jesus defeated death's hold on the cross for those who believe. Sin has no overwhelming power any longer for those who are in Christ, for He has made those who know Him free indeed (John 8:36), able to present their members as those of righteousness (Romans 6:12-14). Indeed, believers are not slaves of the flesh or captives of the devil any longer (2 Timothy 2:26), but they are indeed bondservants of the Most High God who are controlled by love to do as He has asked (2 Corinthians 5:14). We conquer in and through Christ over sin and over death. Satan has already been defeated, for, though we battle temptation in this life, the war has already been won.

The dilemma for many believers comes from the fact that, though we have already won in Christ, sin patterns and struggles can be difficult to overcome. Indeed, our entire lives are a process of sanctification as we work out our salvation in fear and trembling, knowing that it is God in us working according to His good pleasure (Philippians 2:12-13). It is a work He will complete (Philippians 1:6), and He has given us all that is needed for life and godliness (2 Peter 1:3) to enable us to live victoriously, albeit imperfectly. The world needs to see victorious Christians, those who are making steady progress against evil and sin, as opposed to those who live as hypocrites and use Jesus as nothing more than a supposed get-out-of-hell-free card. True believers will manifest true change as their lives bear increasing fruit (Matthew 7:17-20). Sure, there will be setbacks, as we all stumble in many ways (James 3:2), but overall, there should be clear signs of a changed life and transformed heart.

We would expect captives of the devil who are born into the sin nature of Adam (1 Corinthians 15:22) and who have hearts that are deceitful and desperately sick to do wicked things (Jeremiah 17:9). Even their attempts at moral acts come up woefully short in God's eyes (Isaiah 64:6). They have not broken free from the bondage to sin, for only Christ can change the heart and make it new. But in Christ, we who have believed are transformed, indeed, born again, into new creations in Christ. The old man has passed away, and a new person has been regenerated (2 Corinthians 5:17). The old heart of stone (Ezekiel 11:19), representing coldness, dullness, blindness, and selfishness, has been done away with in Christ such that He has given us new hearts that can be made clean and pure (Hebrews 10:22). He has literally changed our being bent to sin to being inclined to righteousness. It is not that we have some

dark force within our hearts making us more likely to wander, falter, and sin than to follow Christ (Romans 8:14). No! Though we still must reckon with our flesh and battle sin, we have Christ inside of our hearts, making Himself at home and changing our longings, our deepest desires, and what we yearn for and hope for. The heart is the wellspring of life in that all that comes forth from us in terms of what we think, do, and speak can be traced back to what we desire in our hearts (Proverbs 4:23, Luke 6:45). If we delight in the Lord, He will give us the desires of our heart (Psalm 37:4). We will want what He wants, and we will seek those things out. Changed desires are central to the whole message of the gospel. Christianity is not some mere reform of external behavior or ritualistic religious experience; rather, it is a total life-altering, heart-renewing, mind-changing, and will-breaking birth into Jesus Christ.

Jesus is the treasure that we have in our mere, mortal earthen vessels (2 Corinthians 4:7). Our identity in Him is where our strength comes from and how we can live out His will in our lives. Galatians 2:20 says, "I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me." The potency of this verse didn't really begin to sink in for me until after my college years. I needed to see that the old me was literally put to death with Christ on the cross and that now He literally lives out His will and desires in and through me. It is not a life for Christ as much as it is a life in Christ, Him in me and I in Him. Romans 6:5-7 says, "For if we have become united with Him in the likeness of His death, certainly we shall also be in the likeness of His resurrection, knowing this, that our old self was crucified with Him, in order that our body of sin might be done away with, so that we would no longer be slaves to sin; for he who has died is freed from sin." This death to sin is the freedom of life in Christ, for the old body of sin has been done away with. Sure, we still battle the lusts of the flesh, but we are not compelled by them, controlled by them, or utterly vulnerable to them. It is not because we are powerful, but it is because Christ has won the victory. He lives within us, enabling us to be conformed into His likeness by grace through faith. We are united with Him in death to sin and in being raised into a new life, a life that will go on forever and one that culminates with our glorification as all that is of fleshly legacy will finally be cast aside.

Colossians 3:3-4 says, "For you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is our life, is revealed, then you also will be revealed with Him in glory." Our lives are not our own, for if they were, we would be victims of sin and temptation to no end. Rather, our lives are hidden with Christ in God because He is our very life, and He is the promise of our future glorified in eternity with Him. He has given us new hearts, He has changed our desires, He has illuminated our minds to the truth of His ways, He has empowered our wills to make God-honoring decisions, and He indwells us so that we are no longer on our own.

Christianity is far more than going to a church to perform acts of worship to a God Who is afar off. In fact, that is a totally incorrect picture. Christianity is really a oneness with Christ as we are blessed to know the only One Who satisfies, Who fills, Who leads, Who enables, and Who empowers. It is an eternal connection with the One Who has freed us from the bondage of sin and death, and it is He Who leads us in triumph in our victory march toward heaven. This is the picture of Christ's church that the world needs to see. So let us depart from the false humility of claiming to be spiritual losers hopelessly marred by sin yet saved by grace to a new paradigm, a Biblical paradigm, in which we are those who are

spiritual victors over sin and death because of Christ in us. God's grace saves and sanctifies, and one day it will glorify. This is true, wonderful, and powerful grace. We are no longer victims but victors in and through Christ, and may He enable us to live in light of these truths.