

LIFE, LOVE and LIGHT

The Gospel of John and First Epistle of John

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CHAPTER TEN

THE VICTORY - THREEFOLD AND THREE.TENSE

"This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith" (I John 5:4)

The experience of Light, Love and Life, as depicted by the Apostle, beautiful in its simplicity and wholly satisfying, is not altogether easy of attainment. It has its enemies. Hence the words, "**victory**" and "**overcome**" (I John 2:13,14; 4:4; 5:4, 5).

The Abiding Life is a life of victory.

And the victory is well within our reach, since the resources are of His own providing. Nay, they are Himself: "**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**" (I John 4:4).

I

The Threefold Enemy

A study of the above citations reveals a threefold enemy: the wicked one; the world; the self-life, that in us to which the former two direct the appeal of their blandishments. Scripture uniformly lists the three: "**the world, the flesh, the devil.**"

There is no difficulty in correlating this threefold enemy with the threefold Gospel. They are actively and aggressively opposed to allegiance to GOD the Father; to faith in, confession of, devotion to, GOD the Son; to life in, and surrender to, the HOLY SPIRIT. They are the threefold enemy of the threefold experience of Life, Light and Love. And yet, sad to say, many confessed followers of CHRIST, children of grace, destined for glory, not only "fall" for their subtleties but glibly declare that they "can see no harm in them."

1. **THE WICKED ONE.** Himself fallen into a state of open rebellion against GOD, he is not content that any man should own allegiance to GOD. Jealous of fealty to Him he came to our

first parents with a threefold temptation (Genesis 3:6) . We read of nothing evil in itself that he asked them to do. His purpose was to sever the life-cord between GOD and man, diverting man's allegiance from GOD to himself. This he accomplished, as history eloquently attests. And today he is doing all possible to prevent a reunion. When, however, such a union is set up through the saving grace of GOD, he does all in his power to disrupt it, making his appeal through the world without and to the flesh within.

2. **THE WORLD.** The Greek word means *world order or system*. It is anything and everything that leaves GOD out. It is a system of thinking and living that does not count GOD essential. It proposes to satisfy man, intellectually, morally, spiritually, socially, economically, apart from GOD. In creed and conduct it is anti-christian; it has its own way of believing and living.

So the Apostle, when once he has mentioned the matter of overcoming the wicked one, links with him the world system he has set up and warns GOD's children against it: "**Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth forever**" (I John 2:15-17).

Note that the threefold temptation used in Eden is here ascribed to the world.

But the Apostle continues, passing from conduct to creed (vs. 18 ff).

The world is "**antichrist**" in its attitude of denying the Deity of CHRIST and the Fatherhood of GOD, solely through Him. "**Who is a liar but he that denieth that Jesus is the Christ? He is antichrist, that denieth the Father and the Son. Whosoever denieth the Son, the same hath not the Father**" (vv. 22, 23).

Soon John returns to the same subject, warning against the world's anti-christian creed of unbelief and the spirits actuating it: "**Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of GOD: because many false prophets are gone out into the world. Hereby know ye the Spirit of God. Every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God: and every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God: and this is that spirit of antichrist, whereof ye have heard that it should come; and even now already is it in the world**" (I John 4:1-3).

If believers, through the years and particularly in our day, had taken seriously these warnings, continuing to abide in Him and in the anointing of His Spirit (I John 2:24-27), the world could not have dictated the denials of essential Christian truth which now stalk, unblushing and unrebuked, through the pulpits and counsels of the Church. "**This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith**" (I John 5:4). Faith in whom? JESUS as the Son of GOD (vs. 5). It is a great conflict; the promise is: "**To him that overcometh.**"

3. **THE FLESH.** What movings the self-life, with its unworthy passions and purposes, has within us. How often we have felt them, been shamed by them, realized our own impotence before them. The flesh in us is the enemy of the Spirit in us, the one "**lusting**" against the other.

The sin of pampering the self-life is that we thereby defeat the gracious purposes of the Spirit in us checkmating His every move to transform us into His likeness. Thus life continues on a fleshly basis, unbeautified, unsanctified. But more. It is the flesh to which the world and the wicked one make their appeal.

Thus we become their easy dupes. We have paved the way for worldly creed and worldly conduct to creep into our lives, much to the satisfaction of Satan. Why does any Christian ever deny the Blood? or the Resurrection? Only through the pride and conceit of the flesh. And who are pleased by such denials? Only Satan and his world-system.

The antidote, so persistently urged by the Apostle, is the Abiding Life.

As one has well said,

"Detachment from the world results from attachment to CHRIST."

As we abide in Him, the Spirit quickens His life and nature in us, we have His mind and walk in His ways.

Therefore, John urgently pleads, "Abide!" "Abide!"

II The Three. Tense Victory

The very soul of our Epistle is the victory of the Christian life - the victory of a genuine Christian experience.

- It is victory through our Lord JESUS CHRIST.
- It is victory through the HOLY SPIRIT, in the reality of the Abiding Life.
- It is victory through the Father's guardian, keeping power, exercised toward His children.
- It is victory over every foe, within and without.
- It is victory over all fear.
- It is victory because CHRIST died, and because He lives.
- It is victory because CHRIST came, and because He is coming again.
- It is victory because GOD is Light, and Love, and Life, and because we know Him.
- It is victory for the past, for the present, and for the future, covering the whole gamut of human need and experience.

1. **VICTORY FOR THE PAST.** It rests in the person, worth and saving work of our Lord JESUS CHRIST: "**Ye know that He was manifested to take away our sins; and in Him is no sin**" (I John 3:5).

- It is in the fact that "**our sins are forgiven us for His name's sake**" (I John 2:12).
- It is in the fact that "**we have passed from death unto life**" - and "**we know**" it (I John 3:14).
- It is the fact that eternal life has become ours in perpetuity, with the HOLY SPIRIT witnessing, personally, within us, what GOD's Word has witnessed to us: "**He that believeth on the Son of**

God hath the witness in himself: he that believeth not God hath made him a liar; because he believeth not the record that God gave of his Son. And this is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life" (1 John 5:10-12).

2. VICTORY FOR THE FUTURE. It rests in the fact that CHRIST is going to "**appear a second time,**" for our complete, perfect and final salvation. "**Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is. And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure" (1 John 3:2-3).**

In that coming for His own we will be brought into His immediate presence - wondrous privilege for one-time sinners, "**without God and without hope in the world" - since "we shall see Him as He is."**

The sight will be transforming, beyond all that we have here experienced: "**We shall be like Him.**" That likeness is to extend even to our body which, in His coming, He will transform "**that it may be conformed to the body of His glory.**" It will bring to full accomplishment His predestinating purpose in us, namely, that we should be "**conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren.**" What a prospect! No wonder that such a "**hope**" has the practical effect of personal purity, even at this present time. To fail to entertain this hope is to lose part of our God-given victory.

3. VICTORY FOR THE PRESENT. We consider this last because it is the chief concern of the Epistle. The past and future aspects of victory are viewed as making the present possible and real. It rests in the fact of the HOLY SPIRIT's abiding presence in the believer, with the correspondent presence of CHRIST the Victor above. It is the Abiding Life, lived out in a continuously satisfying experience of His sustaining power, that power brought to bear upon every phase of life's present problems.

It is victory over sin. Not in saying we have no sin - as though we had this victory in ourselves, independent of Him; not that, but rather in so living and walking that we continually appropriate the victory of Calvary. It is the continuous cleansing of the Blood (1 John 1:7), claimed through our conscious and confessed need of it (vv. 8-10).

But the provision goes further than this. CHRIST not only died; He lives, and is now our "**Advocate with the Father.**" (The same Greek word, translated "**Comforter,**" as is applied to the HOLY SPIRIT here with us).

He is our Lawyer, pleading our case. And His plea is Himself - the fact that He is JESUS CHRIST "**the righteous**" and that we are in Him (1 John 2:1, 2). Through His advocacy any temporary lapse is turned to victory without being suffered to settle in blight upon the soul or becloud its spiritual horizon. He is our propitiation and our righteousness; in Him and through Him we are as though we had never sinned.

It is victory that is continuously ministered and assured by His presence indwelling us.

Says the Apostle:

"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).

This is the keynote of the Epistle.

It is the key of victorious living.

As we abide in Him and He in us we need not fall into sin;

- darkness does not enshroud us
- we walk in the light; disobedience does not beguile us
- we keep His commandments; worldliness does not bewitch us
- we desire to do His will; false doctrine does not mislead us
- we know the true teaching; hatred does not seize upon us
- we love one another with His love; our love does not run to mere words
- we are willing to pay the price of genuine love expressed in deeds of kindness and helpfulness;
- we are not the easy prey of the wicked one's wiles
- we "**keep ourselves**," as GOD's children, that he touch us not.

III

The Threefold Means of Victory

It becomes evident that the secret of victory is simply the Abiding Life.

As we abide we put ourselves in the way of appropriating every provision He has made for a life of victory. Were we able perfectly to abide in Him, our life would approximate His life. Could our life be wholly and solely the expression of His life in us, we would not sin.

These considerations point to the fact that the practical realization of a truly Christian life waits upon our practice of the presence of GOD - anything that makes the bond of union between us and Him vital, that renders Him a transforming force in daily experience.

GOD has appointed certain specific means that minister spiritual health, that make for reality in the Abiding Life - means so essential as to preclude the possibility of success if ignored or neglected.

These means are threefold, as mentioned by our Apostle: the Word of GOD, abiding in us; an emboldened prayer-life; a keeping of His Word in a worthy, obedient walk.

1. **THE WORD OF GOD.** This is the means mentioned in the first section (1 John 2: 14). It is His means for ministering Light to us: "**The entrance of Thy Word giveth light.**" And what a means it is to this end. GOD has promised that it shall not return unto Him void, empty, fruitless (Isaiah 55:10, 11). It is declared to be "**living and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart**" (Hebrews 4:12).

Does anyone desire a life freed from the thralldom of sin, the simple means are at hand in a faithful following of the Psalmist's example: "**Thy Word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against Thee**" (Psalm 119:11).

Do we weary of bearing the impress of the world in our plastic, fleshly nature? Here is GOD's way out: "**But we all**" - the common privilege of Christians as compared with the one experience of Moses - "**with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord**" (II Corinthians 3:18).

Moses let GOD talk to him, and his face shone. With the Bible in hand, the mirror for seeing His face, whensoever we will we may have a like experience of its transforming power, making us over into the likeness of His glory. Saints in all the ages, having recourse to His Word, have proved its strangely quickening, sustaining, glorifying power. To root out sin and self, to make us over into the likeness of our Lord, it must be given its day-by-day play upon the believer's heart. Its neglect is suicidal and fatal to the spiritual life.

2. **THE PRAYER-LIFE.** This is the means mentioned in the second or Love section (3:21, 22; 5:14, 15). Prayer is not merely, nor chiefly, getting things from GOD - although it is that. Prayer is GOD's provision for drawing out the love of His children toward Himself. He bids them come boldly. As they thus come, the heart-life is laid bare before Him. He has opportunity to search it, lift it to a higher level, make it altogether pleasing to Himself, then turn it into channels of self-sacrificing love to fellow-men. No Christian loves deeply, worthily, unselfishly, who is neglecting the prayer-life. Prayer, while conditioned upon the Abiding Life, has a gloriously quickening effect upon that life.

As our Lord prayed, in the mount, He was transformed; out from His whole being, suffusing the veil of flesh, shone the life divine. Something of that same takes place in the soul and shines out through the face, whenever we have truly prayed. It slays the self-life; it quickens the spirit-life; it gives the love of GOD free rein over the heart-life. We need a new evaluation of prayer for its incomparable work within our own being, for the contribution it makes to the Abiding Life, in the constant, transforming communion of Father and child.

3. **THE LIFE OF OBEDIENCE.** This is the practical means pervading the entire Epistle, just as the theme of Life pervades all its pages.

We are so to live that we:

- "**keep His commandments,**"
- "**keep His Word,**"
- "**do those things that are pleasing in His sight.**"

It is the Life lived out. No man has truth beyond what He is able and willing to prove in daily living. The life that abides in Him is the life that lives, not only in communion with Him but in conformity to Him.

So the focal point of Christian doctrine is the appeal for a life that makes practical proof of it: "**I**

beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God" (Romans 12:1, 2).

If we would know the reality of the Abiding Life, let us draw a circle, defining the bounds of Christian living, into which we deliberately step, there to find fellowship with our Lord JESUS CHRIST, delighting ourselves in the things that He and we have in common, letting Him search out the things in us that are foreign to our fellowship, that they may be put away, rejoicing in all that the circle includes "**In Him**," renouncing without reserve all that the circle excludes as not in Him.

"Keep Yourselves from Idols"

With these words our Epistle concludes.

What a climax! How succinctly they state the sine qua non of success in spiritual things. An idol is anything that claims a supreme place in our lives, anything that displaces GOD, anything that seeks to be a substitute for GOD. The covetous man is an idolater (Ephesians 5:5) ; he is letting money, possessions, things take the place of GOD.

The ambitious business man, the devotee of pleasure, the one whose life centers wholly in some dear one - all such are in the danger zone of idolatry.

The Abiding Life is the very opposite. It keeps CHRIST central. It makes Him its center, sphere, and circumference. It says with the Psalmist: "**I have set the Lord always before me.**" It lets Him fill and satisfy the soul, saying, "**Whom have I in heaven but Thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire beside Thee.**"

Discipleship must ever subject itself to the Lord's searching of its aims and purposes. As He turned to His first followers, saying, "**What seek ye?**" (John 1:38), so would He search us today.

What Seek Ye?

What seek ye? Earth's glory, or favor, or pleasure,
The things which attract by their glitter and show,
The worlding's power, his ease or his treasure,
Which th' god of this world can most fully bestow?
The many are seeking the things which will perish,
And few care for those which will not pass away.
My friend, let me earnestly ask you the question -
What is your ambition, what seek ye today?

What seek ye? The Saviour is beckoning onward,
He offers a kingdom, a crown, and a throne;
But th' way to attain them lies often through sorrow,
While th' cross and th' path to be trod are His own -

Are you willing to follow wherever He leadeth?
Do you seek but the things which His favor can give,
If so, you will find at the end of the journey
That by dying to self, you most truly do live.

What seek ye? To dwell with the King for His pleasure,
To follow His precepts, to do but His will;
To seek His approval, His smile, and His favor,
And then to wait on Him obedient and still?
If so, you may not gain the world's commendation,
But His peace and His blessing are richer, my friend;
E'en now in this life you may taste His abundance,
Then yonder the glory that knoweth no end.

Two paths are before you, which one will you follow?
The one which leads upward to treasures on high,
Or the one which looks pleasant, alluring, attractive,
But leads to the things which must perish and die?
Two paths lie before you, and you have the choosing -
Oh, pause and consider, choose wisely, I pray!
The things of eternity claim your attention;
All others are fleeting - what seek ye to-day?

- A. E. R.

~ end of book ~

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