

"OUR SUFFICIENCY IS OF GOD."

– 2 COR. 3:5. –

"Wherefore,...work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God which worketh in you, both to will and to do of his good pleasure." – Phil. 2:12,13.

THE thoughtful reader of the Scriptures must often be impressed with that intensity of zeal and earnest striving urged upon all the followers of Christ who would so run as to obtain the prize of our high calling which is of God in Christ Jesus. For instance, we read: –

"*Strive* to enter in at the strait gate; for many I say unto you will seek to enter in, and shall not be able, when once the Master of the house is risen up and has shut to the door"; "Strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, that leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it"; "Whosoever he be of you that *forsaketh not all that he hath*, he cannot be my disciple"; "Let us lay aside every weight, and the sin that doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus"; "Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life"; "Watch unto prayer"; and, then, "Be sober, and hope to the end for the grace that shall be brought unto you at the appearing of Jesus Christ." And Peter again adds, "Beloved, seeing that ye look for such things, be diligent, that ye may be found of him in peace, without spot and blameless....Seeing that all these [present] things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness." – Luke 13:24; Matt. 7:13,14; Luke 14:33; Heb. 12:1; 1 Tim. 6:12; 1 Pet. 4:7; 1:13; 2 Pet. 3:14,11.

How different all this appears from that easy-going Christianity which seems but a very little removed from the spirit of the world, and which is so common that the zeal which strives and runs and fights and watches with sober vigilance that the sacrifice of self is kept upon the altar is generally regarded as extreme, peculiar, fanatical and foolish.

Nevertheless, in the face of this latent opposition, as well as of all open opposition, the course of the overcomer is right onward. It is a course of self-denial and cross-bearing, even unto the end. It is a dying daily to the spirit, hopes, aims and ambitions of the world which control other men and women, so that in the end of our course we may be of that happy "little flock" of "overcomers" of whom it is written, "Blessed are the dead that die in the Lord." – Rev. 14:13.

These thoughts are strongly suggestive of what it is to be an overcomer. It is, as the Apostle Paul expresses it, to become dead with Christ; – "Now if we be dead with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with him"; "If so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together." (Rom. 6:8; 8:17.) If we would reach that point of deadness to the world which will in the end constitute us overcomers, we must die daily. But herein is a deeper significance than may be apparent at first glance. To die daily, to deny self and humbly take up and patiently bear the **[R2123 : page 85]** daily cross, to mortify the deeds of the body (*i.e.*, to put to death the former dispositions, etc.), means a great deal. It means more than merely the putting away of sin. As human beings we have no right to sin, and must renounce it when we first come to Christ, as only such can be accepted of him. But as new creatures, partakers of the divine nature, through a subsequent more intelligent re-dedication of all our ransomed powers to the service of God alone, and a consequent begetting of the holy spirit to a new divine nature, our business is to die daily to the ordinary and otherwise legitimate ambitions, hopes and aims of the present life. Or, as Paul expresses it: – "Be not conformed to this world, but be ye transformed, that ye may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God" (Rom. 12:2); that is, we are to submit our minds, not to the earthly, but to the heavenly influences which will dictate to us in every matter great and small.

The heavenly influences draw a distinct line of demarkation between things earthly and things heavenly. Upon the one side are the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, which are of

the world (1 John 2:16); while on the other side is that "simplicity and godly sincerity" whose delight is in the beauty of holiness, and whose adornment is a meek and quiet spirit, submissive to discipline, patient in tribulation, always abounding in the work of the Lord and delighting only in his manifest favor. – 2 Cor. 1:12.

But who is sufficient for these things? Who can walk so contrary to the course of this present world? Surely none who have any considerable measure of the world's spirit. It is only as we become filled with the spirit of God that we can do these things. Our sufficiency is not of ourselves; but "our sufficiency is of God." "It is God that worketh in you, both to will and to do of his good pleasure." (Phil. 2:13.) He it is who, for the asking, will so fill us with his spirit that we can go forth from victory unto victory. – "If ye... know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your heavenly Father give the holy spirit to them that ask him." – Luke 11:11-13.

God bestows this grace upon all that diligently seek it of him, through our Lord Jesus Christ, our Redeemer, our Head, our Leader and Teacher. Therefore, says Paul, "I can do all things through Christ, who strengtheneth me"; and again, "The love of Christ constraineth me." (2 Cor. 5:14.) Those who have the spirit of Christ, which is also the spirit of God, the holy spirit, are his disciples under his teaching and training. "If any man have not the spirit of Christ, he is none of his." Thus it is, that God works in us through Christ to will and to do his good pleasure, while in his strength we work out our own salvation with fear and trembling. (Phil. 2:12.) And he also further works in us to this end by all the incentives of his exceeding great and precious promises, his providences, his discipline, training and teaching and also by the sweets of that fellowship with himself, with Christ and with his saints, which is our present and daily privilege.

It is plain, therefore, that as Christians we have a life work before us. It is not enough that we covenant with God to follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth, and that we find ourselves accepted in the

Beloved: that is only the beginning of this higher life. Then begins the work of overcoming, of dying to self and to the world. And who ever found it easy to die?

But now, look away from the struggle of this death to the old nature, and consider the new nature that at the same instant is developing its powers. Every victory gained in the crucifying of the flesh gives the new nature more room to develop and to expand its powers; and as the spirit of the world and the will of the flesh recede, we find ourselves more and more in the company and fellowship of our Lord. True, it is, on the one hand, the fellowship of his sufferings, but on the other, it is the fellowship also of his joys. We enter with him into the joy of knowing and doing our Father's will. Like him, we have meat to eat that others know not of; and we sit together with him in the heavenly places of communion and fellowship. The deep things of God are ours, the precious things symbolized by the gold within the typical Tabernacle, – "the exceeding great and precious promises" and a lively appreciation of them, the deeper experiences of divine grace, the abiding presence of the Father and the Son realized, the fellowship with the Father and with the Son, and the communion of saints.

These are some of the present rewards of dying daily to the world and becoming correspondingly alive toward God. The new nature, daily becoming more and more alive toward God, has an increasing sense of the value of these spiritual blessings; and with such appreciation comes a more earnest, ardent longing after more and more of the fellowship and favor of God, and more intense longings after holiness. The language of every such heart is beautifully expressed by the Psalmist, – "As the heart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God. My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God: when shall I come and appear before God?" – Psa. 42:1,2.

This hungering and thirsting after righteousness, this reaching out after God, this patient, loving submission to all the heavenly influences of divine grace through whatsoever channels they may flow to us; these

are all parts of the transforming work that will, in the end, make us overcomers. To resist continually those influences which would conform us to this world is to die daily to **[R2123 : page 86]** the world, to overcome the world, and to refuse to be conformed to this world; while to cultivate the higher spiritual aspirations is to be transformed, changed, to be developed as new creatures begotten to the divine nature. This process of dying daily to the things that belong to this world and of being transformed by the renewing of the mind to the divine nature and likeness is the Christian's most important life work; and if it be diligently pursued we shall at last be accounted worthy to be of the spiritual seed, which, in the resurrection, shall receive its own appropriate body, like unto Christ's glorious body. (1 Cor. 15:38,48,49.) But this selfward work does not end with self, for it includes a glowing zeal for God which, by example and precept and diligent service, ever strives to push forward the great work of the Lord.

In this view of the matter it is clear that this great work before us requires patient, watchful diligence, spiritual ambition and effort, fervency of spirit and persevering energy and faith in God. Only those who have and who cultivate these qualities can ever hope to be "overcomers" – "dead with Christ." It was **[R2124 : page 86]** such considerations that prompted those earnest exhortations of the Lord and the apostles to faithfulness and diligence in our warfare against the world, the flesh and the devil. We are reminded, too, that in our warfare we wrestle not with flesh and blood, but with the invisible powers of darkness strongly intrenched both in the world and in the downward tendencies of our fallen flesh; besides which there are innumerable arts and wiles of the adversary, against which we must maintain a vigilant watch.

We cannot afford, therefore, to slacken our diligence, or to grow negligent in availing ourselves of any of the means of grace, or to waste the precious time granted to us for this overcoming work in idly dreaming of the crown, while we fail to bear the cross. Let us be up and doing, for "the time is short," the work is great, the way is narrow, the

obstacles are many, the foes and their devices increase: let us be sober, let us be vigilant. But let us not forget that the work is the Lord's, in the sense that his strength supplied to us is vouchsafed to accomplish it, and that he who has begun the good work in us is able to complete it; and he will do so, if we let him; *i.e.*, if we obediently follow his leading, doing his will.

To do this requires faith: "This is the victory that overcometh the world, even your faith." A wavering faith will hold on, with one hand at least, to the things of this world, as "something tangible," being afraid to let go and trust in the things unseen and to live for them alone. But our Lord encouragingly says, "Be of good cheer, I have overcome the world." (John 16:33.) Having overcome, he has long since entered into his glory; and it is the Father's good pleasure to permit those to share that glory with him who, when tried and proved, as he was proved, under the discipline of fiery trial, shall not be found wanting in faithfulness and zeal for God.

Let us, then, as many as would be counted worthy to live and reign with Christ, take heed, not to the examples of the multitudes of those who name the name of Christ, but, first of all, to the perfect pattern, Christ Jesus, and secondly to those most faithful ones who follow in his footsteps of self-denial and of zeal for the cause of God.

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