

Victory Over Your Besetting Sin



David Wilkerson July 1, 1979

Sin causes Christians to become craven cowards who live in humiliating defeat. They can't stand up with courage against sin because of the secret sin in their own lives. They excuse the sins of others because of the disobedience in their own hearts and they can't preach victory because they live in defeat. Some of them once knew what it was like to live victoriously, taking vengeance against sin, having fulfilled Christ's righteousness in their own lives. They experienced the power, the courage, the blessings that come to those who are obedient to the Lord. Today they are but a shadow of their old selves. Now they hang their heads in shame, unable to look the world in the eye, victimized by a sin that rules their lives. A besetting sin has robbed them of their spiritual vitality and one enemy after another is raised up against them.

A once mightily used evangelist now sells cars in a small town in Texas. He once stood in the pulpit as a powerful preacher of the Gospel and thousands were converted through his ministry. He became an adulterer, left his wife and ran off with his girlfriend. In just a few weeks, he lost everything. That minister is now but a shell of his old self, to see him shuffle about, beaten down and sad-eyed, is pitiful! He lives in constant fear and spends sleepless nights thinking of what could have been. His anxieties have made him physically ill, he has heart pains, ulcers and hypertension. He has repented of his sin, but he cannot undo the past. God forgives, but people don't.

A sixteen-year-old youth confessed to me, "I'm having sex with my girlfriend. I've been reading what the Bible says about fornication and adultery and now I'm scared. I worry that God will have to judge me if the Bible is true. I keep doing it and I'm full of fear, guilt and worry. It seems like there are two people inside me - a good one and a bad one. I am afraid the bad person in me will overpower the good person and God will have to give up on me. How can I make sure the good person in me gets the victory?"

Both the minister and the boy have been overpowered by their enemies of guilt, fear and depression. They are victims, defeated and humiliated by unseen enemies that threaten to destroy them. Sin always brings on the enemies. Sin weakens all resistance; it turns warriors into weaklings. Lust conceives, then it brings on sin, and sin brings on the enemy to destroy.

We Must Learn From Examples In The Old Testament

David had enemies. They were the Philistines, the Amorites, the Syrians and other enemies arrayed against Israel. When David was right with the Lord and in good fellowship, none of his enemies could stand before him. He slew them by the tens of thousands and his name was feared in every enemy camp. But when David sinned and became estranged from the Lord, his enemies grew bold and triumphed over him. Sin caused him to lose his courage and confidence, making him weak before all his enemies.

David's sin of adultery immediately followed one of his greatest victories. The Ammonite-Syrian war was one of Israel's greatest battles. David gathered all Israel together, passed with them over Jordan and did battle at Helam. The Syrians fled before Israel - seven hundred chariots were destroyed, forty thousand horsemen killed and all the kings allied with the Ammonites and Syrians fled. The chapter on this great war closes by saying, "And they made peace with Israel and served them" (2 Samuel 10). This great man of God, basking in the glory of his greatest victory, begins to lust after Bathsheba, kills her husband Uriah and commits adultery with her. "But the thing that David had done displeased the Lord" (2 Samuel 11:27).

So the Lord sent the prophet Nathan to David. The prophet did not come to counsel David on how to handle his guilt and condemnation. He did not offer the king a salve for his stricken conscience. Rather, Nathan got right to the heart of the matter. "Thou art the man. You have despised the commandment of the Lord. You have done evil in the sight of the Lord. You are guilty of secret sin."

Sin Brings On Its Own Judgment.

To a man after His own heart, God had to say, "Behold, I will raise up evil against thee out of thine own house..." (2 Samuel 12:11). Shortly after, his beloved son Absalom turns against him and David flees for his life into the wilderness. What a pitiful sight!

"And David went up by the ascent of mount Olivet, and wept as he went up, and had his head covered, and he went barefoot and all the people that was with him covered every man his head, and they went up, weeping as they went up" (2 Samuel 15:30).

Is this weeping, barefooted, broken man the same great king who, just months before, had defeated two world powers? What turned him into a weak, powerless and cowardly man who fled before, the enemy? It was sin - nothing else! Like Samson, David was shorn of his courage and power because he caved in to the weakness of his flesh.

Solomon, too, was feared by all his enemies. Pharaoh's armies were held off by his powerful reputation. The Edomites dared not attack so powerful a king. His was a glorious reign and his fame was unparalleled. He was blessed, prospered and honored in everything he did. But Solomon sinned against the Lord and permitted his love for God to grow cold. He lost touch with heaven. And look what happened. God said to him, "Because you failed to keep my covenant and my statutes ... and have turned aside to other gods...I will rend the kingdom from you..." (1 Kings 11:11).

Suddenly the enemies of Solomon fall upon him. "And the Lord stirred up an adversary unto Solomon, Hadad the Edomite..." (1 Kings 11:14). Not just one enemy, but two: "And God stirred up another adversary, Rexon ... and he abhorred Israel..." (1 Kings 11:23-25). Sin and compromise so weakened this mighty king, even his servant became an enemy. "And Jeroboam ... Solomon's servant, even he lifted up his hand against the king" (1 Kings 11:26).

Not a single enemy of Israel could stand before them when that nation did what was right before God. Their enemies fled in terror at the mention of their name. The enemies' hearts "melted like wax" when the victorious armies of Israel went to war, with banners waving. But when Israel sinned, even their weakest enemies prevailed against them. Achan committed an accursed sin and the minuscule army of Ai sends Israel running in humiliation and defeat.

Listen to the prayer of Solomon at the dedication of the temple and you soon discover that all Israel was aware of what made them victorious and what brought defeat upon them.

"When thy people Israel be smitten down before the enemy, because they have sinned against thee .. If they sin against thee, (for there is no man that sinneth not) and thou be angry with them, and deliver them to the enemy...(1 Kings 8:33,46).

All Israel had to do, to maintain the copious blessings of the Lord was to "harken diligently to the Lord's commandments, to love the Lord and serve Him with all thy heart and soul." God promised blessings beyond anything they could imagine. God promised them, "There shall no man be able to stand before you, for the Lord your God shall lay the fear of you and the dread of you upon all the land that ye shall tread upon..." (Deuteronomy 11:25).

Israel was told, "Behold, I set before you this day a blessing and a curse; a blessing, if ye obey ... And a curse, if ye ... turn aside out of the way..." (Deuteronomy 11:26-28).

Is This Generation Bringing On Itself A Curse?

Such a very clear manifestation of God at work must not be lost on us today. Is this why we are falling as victims before our modern enemies? We do not fight against flesh and blood enemies - ours are more powerful!. Our enemies are fear, depression, guilt, condemnation, worry, anxiety, loneliness, emptiness, despair.

Has God changed in His character or does He still "stir up adversaries" against a sinful, compromising generation? Can it be that these modern-day enemies are overpowering many of God's people because of their hidden sin and backsliding? It was not a heavy yoke God put on His people. It was so simple and easy: "Obey and be blessed or disobey and suffer." That same message is echoed in the New Testament:

'For to be carnally minded is death; but to be spiritually minded is life and peace' (Roman 8:6).

We have had enough teaching on how to cope with our problems and fear. We have not had enough teaching about how to deal with sin in our lives. You can't heal cancer by putting patches on it. It has to be removed. We will continue to be a neurosis-bound people as long as we excuse the sin in us. No wonder we are so depressed, worried, burdened with guilt and condemnation - we live on in our disobedience and compromise.

Most of us are fully aware that sin is at the root of all our problems. We know that sin causes fear, guilt and depression. We know it robs us of all spiritual courage and vitality. But what we do not know is how to overcome the sin that so easily besets us.

Most of the books I've read about achieving Christ's righteousness - and how to live a holy life - never tell you how to get and keep the victory over sin. We hear it preached at us all the time, "Sin is your enemy. God hates your sin. Walk in the Spirit. Forsake your evil ways. Lay aside that sin you keep indulging in. Don't be bound by the cords of your own iniquity." That's all well and good.

You Can't Just Walk Away From Your Besetting Sin

How do you overcome a sin that has become a habit? Where is the victory over a besetting sin that almost becomes a part of your life? You can hate that sin; you can keep on swearing you will never do it again; you can cry and weep over it and live in remorse over what it does to you - but how do you walk away from it? How do you reach the point where that sin no longer enslaves you?

Recently, I asked over 300 seekers a very pointed question: "How many of you are fighting a losing battle against a besetting sin? How many have one secret sin that keeps dragging you down?" I was shocked at the quick reaction. Almost all of them admitted they were victims, seeking desperately to be delivered from a sin that bound them.

I hear such horrible admissions of defeat and failure everywhere I go concerning this matter of victory over a besetting sin. Most are dedicated Christians who deeply love the Lord. They are not wicked or vile people; it's just that they have to admit, "I have this one problem that keeps me from being totally free."

The Confessions Are Honest And Heartrending

"I can't tell anybody what my secret battle is; it's between the Lord and me. I've prayed for deliverance for over three years now. I've made a thousand promises to quit. I've lived in torment. The fear of God haunts me. I know it's wrong. But try as I may, I keep on doing it. I sometimes think I'm hooked forever."

"You tell me to lay aside my sin - great! I've done that hundreds of times. But my sin won't let go of me. Just when I think I've gotten the victory - WHAM - it comes back again. I've cried a river of tears over my sinfulness and I'm tired of promising God I'll never do it again. All I want is to be free, but I don't know how. I know I'll never be what God wants me to be until I get the victory".

"I've been preaching to others for over fifteen years, but recently I fell into Satan's trap. I've been crippled spiritually and as much as I hate my besetting sin, I can't seem to get free of this bondage. None of the formulas and solutions I preached to others seem to work for me. Frankly, I wonder how long God will put up with me before I'm exposed."

Is There Victory Over All Our Habituating Sins?

I have no formulas, no simple solutions. I do know there is much comfort in the Bible for those who are fighting battles between the flesh and the Spirit. Paul fought the same kind of battle, against the same kind of enemy. He confessed, "For the good that I would I do not, but the evil which I would not, that I do" (Romans 7:19).

Paul cried out, just as all mankind does, "O wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" He goes on to say, "I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord..."

Yes, we know - victory over all our enemies is through Jesus Christ the Lord. But how do we get the power out of His vine into our puny, little branch? How does this thing work? I love Jesus, always have; I know He has all power. I know He promises me victory, but just what does it mean? How does the victory come? It's not enough to be forgiven; you must be free from going back to your sin.

I am just beginning to see a little light on this great mystery of godliness. God is asking me to do the following three things in my own search for total victory over all my besetting sins.

1. I must learn to hunger for holiness and to hate my besetting sin!

Every waking moment I must remind myself that God hates my sin. Mostly, because of what it does to me. God hates it because it weakens me and makes me a coward. Therefore, I cannot be a vessel of honor to do His work on earth. If I excuse my sin as a weakness - if I make myself believe I am an exception and that God will bend over backwards to comply with my needs - if I put out of mind all thoughts of divine retribution - then I am on the way to accepting my sin and opening myself to a reprobate mind. God wants me to loathe my sin, to hate it with all that is within me. There can be no victory or deliverance from sin until I am convinced God will not permit it!

The fear of God against sin is the basis of all freedom. God cannot look upon sin; He cannot condone it; He cannot make a single exception - so face it! It is wrong! Don't expect to be excused or to be given special privileges. God must act against all sin that threatens to destroy one of His children. It is wrong and nothing will ever make it right. Sin pollutes the pure stream of holiness flowing through me. It must be confessed and forsaken. I must be convinced of that.

2. I must be convinced God loves me in spite of my sin!

God hates my sin with a perfect hatred while, at the same time, He loves me with an infinite compassion. His love will never once compromise with sin, but He clings to His sinning child with one purpose in mind - to reclaim him.

His wrath against my sin is balanced by His great pity for me as His child. His pity conquers His loathing against my sin the moment He sees me hating it as He does. My motive must never be fear of God's wrath against my sin, but a willingness to accept His love that seeks to save me. If His love for me cannot save me His wrath never will. It should be more than my sin that shames me and humbles me; it should be the knowledge that He keeps loving me in spite of all I've done to grieve Him.

Think of it! God pities me! He knows the agony of my battle. He is never far off, He is always there with me, reassuring me that nothing can ever separate me from His love. He knows my battle is enough burden without forcing me to carry on with the added fear of wrath and judgment. I know His love for me will cause Him to withhold the rod while the battle is being fought. God will never hurt me, strike me or abandon me while I am in the process of hating my sin and seeking help and deliverance. While I am swimming against the tide, He is always on shore, ready to throw me a life line.

3. I must accept the loving help of my Father in resisting and overcoming.

Sin is like an octopus with many tentacles trying to crush out my life. Seldom do all tentacles loosen their hold on me at once. It is one tentacle at a time. In this war against sin, it is victory - one dead soldier at a time. Seldom does the entire enemy army fall dead at a single blast. It is hand-to-hand combat. It is one small victory at a time. But God doesn't send me out to do battle without a war plan. He is my Commander; I will fight inch by inch, hour by hour - under His direction.

He dispatches the Holy Spirit to me with clear direction on how to fight, when to run, where to strike next. This battle against principalities and powers is His war against the devil - not mine. I am just a soldier, fighting in His war. I may get weary, wounded and discouraged, but I can keep on fighting when I know He must give me the orders. I am a volunteer in His war. I am ready to do His will at all cost. I will wait for His orders on how to win. Those directions come slowly at times. The battle seems to go against me, but -in the end I know we win. God wants me to just believe in Him. Like Abraham, my faith is counted to me as righteousness. The only part I can play in this war is to believe God will bring me out of the battle victoriously.

Finally - When The Sin In Me Is Conquered, All My Other Enemies Must Flee

What I do about the sin in my life determines how my enemies will behave. Victory over besetting sin causes all my other enemies to flee. Worry, fear, guilt, anxiety, depression, restlessness, loneliness - all are my enemies. But they can harm me only when sin turns me into an unprotected target. The righteous are as bold as a lion. They have a clear mind and conscience and that is a fortress these enemies cannot overrun.

Do you want victory over all your enemies? Then go at it the right way by dealing ferociously with your besetting sin. Remove the accursed thing in your life and you will become mighty in God.

"Let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset (surround or harass) us..." (Hebrews 1 2:1).

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