

THE UPWARD LOOK

Is Victory Earned or a Gift?

An Answer to a Question in "Notes on Open Letters" in The Sunday School Times.

EVERY saved child of God at one time or another longs for victory over sin. Yet many such children of God have sadly given up hope of having in this world a complete victory, mistakenly supposing that that blessing is only for the life after this. They do not know how simple, and how immediately available, is the victory for which they are not daring to hope. It is right at hand, in Christ, for all who let him deceive them as to the lie which Satan has told them, and who will receive the victorious life as the outright, supernatural gift of God.

An earnest Christian expresses what are more or less the thoughts of many on this subject. He writes with hearty appreciation, yet with frankly expressed positiveness:

Under the heading, "Victory Christ's Work, Not Ours," you state:

"Christ is living the victorious life to-day; and Christ is *your* life. Therefore stop trying. Let him do it all. Your effort is trying to do nothing to do with the salvation which you have in Christ. In exactly the same way your effort and trying can have nothing to do with the complete victory which Christ has achieved for you and can steadily achieve in you."

Can this be true? If it is, why should any one make the effort so much as to accept Christ as Saviour, let alone striving to put out of his life tendencies he knows are bad, that his life may be purer and better, more attractive and lovable? If Christ does it all, why so much as the effort even to believe that he is the Saviour?

You have taken the incentive to be a Christian out of the hands of any one by saying that Christ saves whom he will regardless of whether they want to be saved or not, or you are preaching the zoepel of universal salvation.

I have no hesitations in saying I do not perceive refutes it. Had I never made the effort to be a child of God through Christ, and desired it and agonized that I might be saved, I do not believe that I should ever have had the consciousness of being saved by him, but probably would have gone on as a selfish, self-seeking man of the world, and paid less and less attention to his claims upon my life. Therefore I claim that Christ does his efforts won the victory,—either futile without the other.

I believe that the victorious life which your correspondent writes about is brought about by the continuous desire and effort to gain it, and that it will not come without the desire and that effort. I realize, of course, that no man can save himself, but I believe that God expects every man to do his part toward that salvation.

It is true that God can save no man unless that man does his part toward salvation. But what is man's part? It is to receive the salvation that God offers him in Christ. The Sunday School Times is not preaching Universalism. It believes that the whole message of the Bible rebukes that mistake. God forces salvation on no one; and God has revealed to us in his Word that many reject salvation. Our wills are free to act; their action is the accepting or the rejecting of the "free gift of God" — eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord."

But this act of the will, by which we voluntarily and deliberately decide to take what God offers us, is not what was meant, in that editorial on victory, by "effort." Men do not, by agonized effort, secure their salvation. They may agonize indeed under the conviction of sin which the Holy Spirit brings into their life. That is his way of showing them that they need salvation. But their agony ceases when they accept the free gift and realize that God has done for them

what, by all their agony, they could never have done for themselves.

Yet the great truth that so many earnest, surrendered Christians have even yet failed to see is that salvation is a twofold gift, freedom from the penalty of sin, and freedom from the power of sin. All Christians have received in Christ as their Saviour their freedom from the penalty of their sins, and they have received this as an outright gift from God. But many Christians have not yet realized by the same kind of faith in the same God and Saviour, receive now and here the freedom from the power of their sins which was won for them by their Saviour on the cross and in his Resurrection victory. Even though they know clearly that their own salvation from the penalty of their sins, they are yet deceived by the adversary into believing that something of their own efforts must play a part in their present victory over the power of their sins. Our efforts can, not only never play any part in our victory over the power of sin, but

they can and do effectually prevent such victory.

If an unsaved man came to Christ, and said, "I want to be saved from the penalty of my sins, and I will let you save me provided you will let me share in accomplishing my salvation, so that you and I shall always know of it," Christ could not save that man. Salvation is a gift; and a gift is not a gift if it is partly earned.

In exactly the same way, if we, as saved Christians, come to our Lord and say, "I want to be saved from the power of my sins, and I will let you share with you in the work of overcoming their power, so that you and I shall always know that part of this victory has been accomplished by you, and part has been accomplished by me," Christ cannot save us from the power of our sins. When our Lord says to us by the Holy Spirit through Paul, "Sin shall not have dominion over you; for ye are not under law, but under grace," he wants us to remember what grace is. Grace is not partly man's work and partly God's

work. It is wholly God's work and exclusively God's work; and all that man can do is to receive it as God's outright, undeserved, and wholly sufficient gift.

We are to use our will to accept the gift of victory; we are not to make an effort to win the victory. What should we say of children in a household who spent Christmas Eve agonizing in their desires and efforts to make sure that on the morrow they should have all the gifts that Christmas ought to bring them? Would this be pleasing to the loving parents who had been spending themselves to the uttermost of their resources to provide gifts for those children? Even supposing that on Christmas morning the children stopped their agonizing and their efforts, and gratefully took from all that was being offered to them; in what was being offered to them; might before have played in the receiving of the gifts? At the best would it not have been, not only utterly unnecessary, but a sad reflection on the trustworthiness and love of the parents? And could not the receiving



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