

Sabbath School Today **With the 1888 Message Dynamic**

The Book of Romans **Lesson 12. Overcoming Evil With Good**

Many people feel distressed by the idea of “overcoming” all evil in their lives, even saying that it is impossible for anyone, except Christ, to resist all the devil’s temptations. The argument is that while we can resist some things easily and never be burdened by them at all, other temptations are just too much for our fallen characters.

E. J. Waggoner expressed it this way: “We know that many have this idea, first, because we have heard them say so, and second, because there are such multitudes of professed Christians who show the working of no greater power than their own.” “We have heard many people tell how hard they found it to do right; their Christian life was most unsatisfactory to them, being marked only by failure, and they were tempted to give up in discouragement.” [1]

The message God sent through A. T. Jones and E. J. Waggoner in 1888 is the answer to the predicament of wanting to live a good Christian life and seeming always to fall short. The message of Christ and His righteousness presented in Romans chapters 4 through 8 culminates in Romans 12:1-3—the apostle Paul “beseeching” everyone to submit to the grace, mercy, and power of God. The apostle Paul wrote that we are to “present [our] bodies”—and minds—as “a living sacrifice to God, which is [our] reasonable service.” What God calls us to is “reasonable”; He would not say “be ye perfect” if it were impossible.

In the previous eleven chapters of the Book of Romans, Paul presented the logical arguments for why we should heed God’s call to righteousness in Christ Jesus: we’re all sinners in need of the Saviour. In chapter 12 he begins to make the application to the individual believer. In saying that we are to present our bodies and minds as a living sacrifice to God, Paul is telling us that we are to be transformed through a “renewing”—a renovation, a complete change for the better—that is effected by the Holy Spirit in our lives on a continual, daily basis.

Through the power of God we are to overcome every besetting sin that plagues us. “An overcomer is one who gains victories. The inheriting is not the overcoming; that is only the reward for overcoming. The overcoming is now; the victories to be gained are victories over the lusts of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—victory over self and selfish indulgences. ... Now how may we gain continual victories in our spiritual warfare? Listen to the beloved disciple:—‘For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world; and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith.’ 1 John 5:4.” [2]

We are to “present” our lives to God as a living sacrifice. It is “living” because our faith grows, “from faith to faith” as we learn how powerful the Holy Spirit is when we call upon Him to defeat Satan’s temptations. At the beginning of his letter to the Romans, Paul said that God’s people are to live by faith (Rom. 1:16, 17). Here at the beginning of chapter 12 he states that “every man” has been given, not just “a” measure, but *the full measure* of faith—the faith of the Son of God.

When Christ came to this world He exercised His faith in the Father’s power, saying, “I can of Mine own self do nothing” (John 5:30). Through faith in His Father’s power, “[Christ] has met the chiefest foe of all and has vanquished him singlehanded. Those who follow Him invariably go forth conquering and to conquer.” [3] The faith that is freely given to us completely defeated Satan at every point. This powerful gift of faith is ours to exercise and cultivate until we meet Jesus face to face at the second coming.

The gospel of Jesus Christ “is the power of God unto salvation ... for therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith” (Rom. 1:16, 17). “This expression has been the subject of much learned discussion by theologians, and very few of them are agreed as to its meaning. The fact that learned men are disagreed in regard to it, need not frighten us from it with the thought that it cannot be understood, for we read that things hidden from the wise and prudent are revealed unto babes.”

The Lord’s specially delegated messenger goes on, “The gospel is the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth, because it makes manifest the righteousness of God. ... By the gospel the fruits of righteousness are made to appear in the life of the believer.” [4] This is the essence of the message God sent through E. J. Waggoner and A. T. Jones in 1888—the righteousness of Christ manifested in His faithful followers.

For too long we have been praying for the outpouring of the Latter Rain, while we’re still infected with a dead formalism, not having the righteousness which is of faith through a heart appreciation of the great sacrifice that the Godhead made to save us from our sins. To continue in a life of sin, not only is a denial of the power of God over Satan, it is trampling upon our crucified Redeemer and putting Him to an open shame (Heb. 6:6). “Heaven’s glorious ladder [Christ] is let down in every man’s path, barring his way to vice and folly. He must trample upon a crucified Redeemer ere he can pass onward to a life of sin.” [5]

God calls us to a “living sacrifice” not the dead works of formalism; not another forty-day plan for revving our spiritual engines, or a longer list of promises to obey and love Him, or any other systematic program intended to cure our spiritual lethargy. “This evil spirit of dead formalism has spread itself far beyond the bounds of the organized Papacy. It is the bane of the profession of Christianity everywhere today; and even the profession of the Christianity of the third angel’s message has not entirely escaped it. It is to be the worldwide prevailing evil of the last days up to the very coming of the Lord in glory in the clouds of heaven.” [6]

In 2 Timothy 3:1-5, Paul writes an astounding list of terrible sins that are all prevalent in today's society. But the most astonishing of all is that Paul warns us that the people committing these sins are in the church! They "have a form of godliness, but [are] denying the power" of God that should be outworking in their lives as they overcome every evil with the goodness of God's righteousness.

We are not to be "conformed to this world, but transformed by a renewing of our mind" (Rom. 12:2). God calls us to be transformed in mind because the mind is the source of our character. We are to let Christ's "mind" be our mind (Phil. 2:5), and then He will live out His life through us.

Is this really so important? Yes—the whole point of overcoming is not so we can get to heaven, but that we can demonstrate to the watching universe that God's ways are superior to Satan's, and that Satan is a defeated foe. By faith we overcome all evil in our lives and proclaim the goodness of our Saviour. Then God can finally point to His faithful few and say, "Here are they that keep the Commandments of God and the faith of Jesus." Then we will have vindicated the character of God in the final hours of the great controversy. And then Jesus will come to defend His own in that ultimate showdown between evil and good, and Satan and sin will be destroyed in the lake of fire (Rev. 19:11-16; 20:14, 15).

—Ann Walper

Endnotes:

- [1] E. J. Waggoner, "Living by Faith," *The Bible Students Library*, Dec. 1, 1890, pp. 2, 4.
- [2] *Ibid.*, pp. 4, 5.
- [3] *Ibid.*, p. 6.
- [4] *Ibid.*, pp. 9, 10.
- [5] Ellen G. White, "Among the Churches—St. Helena," *Signs of the Times*, Jan. 26, 1882.
- [6] A. T. Jones, "A Dead Formalism," *Bible Echo*, Feb. 4, 1895.

Notes:

Pastor Paul Penno's video of this lesson is on the Internet at:

<https://youtu.be/xIWkHW3mT9g>

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