

The Way to the Victorious Life

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Gotthold Beck

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Remain alert. Keep standing firm in your faith.
Keep on being courageous and strong.
Everything you do should be done lovingly. - 1
Corinthians 16:13-14.
[International Standard Version]

With these verses, the apostle Paul showed the brothers and sisters in Corinth the way that led to the victorious life. He knew that it was exactly what they needed because the brothers and sisters in Corinth were totally confused after being faced with many problems. This whole letter of Paul was by itself the answer of God to the sufferings of the brothers and sisters in Corinth.

Just as the brothers and sisters in Corinth were filled with a sense of defeat in all aspects, we too have experienced defeat many times in our lives. Very often, we stain the honor of the Lord. We even hindered the work of the Lord from time to time.

Still, there are two things which are absolutely true. Firstly, all believers desperately desire to lead a "life of victory." Secondly, the Scripture clearly indicates how we can share in the victorious life. This proves that it is the intention of the Lord to let us live a life of victory and it should be our aim as well. Let us look at some verses.

So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed! - John 8:36.

For sin will not have mastery over you, because you are not under Law but under grace. - Romans 6:14.

In all these things we are triumphantly victorious due to the one who loved us. - Romans 8:37.

This is the promised victory given to us.

But thanks be to God! He always leads us triumphantly by the Messiah and through us spreads everywhere the fragrance of knowing him. - 2 Corinthians 2:14.

This also means the triumph of ourselves. To the brothers and sisters in Corinth, Paul commanded, "Remain alert. Keep standing firm in your faith. Keep on being courageous and strong. Everything you do should be done lovingly (1 Corinthians 16:13-14)."

This was not just a word of advice to encourage them, but it was something far more significant. That is to say, the 'gospel' is proclaimed in here. The true living God, our Lord, made it possible for all believers to enter the life of victory. And, the Lord never gives us any command without providing us with the strength needed to accomplish it. Therefore, we do not need any 'advice' from men. What we need is the 'Gospel.' It is the Lord Jesus himself.

What is important is that the Lord gives us the strength to obey his commands. These two verses tell us what we have to do practically, rather than the doctrine behind them. It is for this reason that they sound like military commands.

Brothers and sisters who have encountered the Lord Jesus are regarded as his soldiers. Let us look at some of his words.

Join me in suffering like a good soldier of the Messiah Jesus. No one serving in the military gets mixed up in civilian matters, for his aim is to please his commanding officer. - 2 Timothy 2:3-4.

So whether we are at home or away from home, our goal is to be pleasing to him. - 2 Corinthians 5:9.

Let us ask our hearts sincerely today: has it become our heartfelt desire to please the one who has sacrificed his own life on our behalf? It is important, not only to believe in the Lord Jesus, but to have a sincere desire to please the Lord. Those who lack this desire will neither be blessed nor used by him.

What I want you to recognize again today is that we are cast into the middle of horrible warfare.

For our struggle is not against human opponents, but against rulers, authorities, cosmic powers in the darkness around us, and evil spiritual forces in the heavenly realm. - Ephesians 6:12.

But, let us thank the Lord Jesus. The ultimate victory has already been attained. Jesus has won the perfect victory over the power of the devil through the death and the resurrection of himself. Now, he has been taken up to heaven and placed at the right hand side of the Father, God.

In order for the victory that the Lord Jesus obtained to be revealed in the life of all believers, the Holy Spirit was sent. When the Holy Spirit is given an opportunity to work within us, we share in the victory of the Lord. It is not our victory, but the victory of the Lord Jesus. Now, what do we have to do to participate in this victory?

In the verses we read at the beginning of this article, Paul referred to five things to do. They can be

rephrased this way: always remain alert and stay vigilant, be strengthened in our faith, continue to grow and become completely matured, rely on and depend on the Lord alone, and do everything in love. I would like to begin the discussion based on these five things.

1. Always Remain Alert and Stay Vigilant.

To begin with, we have been given a clear command that should never be forgotten: “remain alert.” You have to always be on your guard. It is important for us to constantly be watchful and stay wary. We are like soldiers on the night watch. For such soldiers, the primary requirement is to stay awake because the enemy could begin to attack at any moment. We, all believers, need to remain alert all the time. Three enemies, “this world,” “flesh,” and “the devil” are waiting to drag us down. We need to continue to stay alert and remain watchful because otherwise, these three powerful enemies will come for us. Are we prepared enough for the attack of these enemies?

(1) The First Enemy: This World Surrounding Us.

Corinth was one of the most important cities of Greece of those days, and it was a capital of commerce and education. The city was prosperous, beautiful and attractive. However, on the other hand, it was filled with sins and temptations.

The brothers and sisters in Corinth had been led to the belief only a short while before. Prior to that time, most of them used to be idol worshippers whose lives were morally disreputable. However, when they were told that their sins were forgiven through an encounter with the Lord Jesus, they rejoiced greatly. From then on, it became their desperate desire to “live for the Lord Jesus.”

However, as time went on, they were captivated again by the world around them, which tempted them in every way in an effort to weaken them and paralyze their faith. Even today, no matter where we are, in Corinth, New York, or Tokyo, this world surrounding us never ceases to tempt us in an effort to blind us and deceive us so that we only seek comfort in our lives. These words of God apply to us too:

Stop loving the world and the things that are in the world. If anyone persists in loving the world, the Father's love is not in him. For everything that is in the world—the desire for fleshly gratification, the desire for possessions, and worldly arrogance—is not from the Father but is from the world. And the world and its desires are fading away, but the person who does God's will remains forever. - 1 John 2:15-17.

(2) The Second Enemy: The Flesh that dwells within

us.

Our second enemy is the flesh that dwells within us. The flesh represents our innate sinful nature, which is fundamentally corrupt and has no chance to recover by itself. Paul, knowing this, explained it in this verse:

For I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my flesh. For I have the desire to do what is right, but I cannot carry it out. - Romans 7:18.

Finally, Paul felt so desperate about his situation that it made him cry out this way:

What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body that is infected by death? - Romans 7:24.

However, this was not the end of the story, which is a wonderful blessing. Paul continued his words, feeling that his burden was taken away:

Thank God through Jesus the Messiah, our Lord. - Romans 7:25.

Our liberation is in Jesus, the Lord.

Too often, we are controlled by our sinful nature. It is revealed every time we commit either sins of the flesh, or sins of the spirit. The sins of our flesh are listed in the Epistle to Galatians as follow:

Now the actions of the flesh are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity, promiscuity, idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, rivalry, jealousy, outbursts of anger, quarrels, conflicts, factions, envy, murder, drunkenness, wild partying, and things like that. - Galatians 5:19-21.

However, the sins of our Spirit are artfully concealed, and also include pride, critical attitudes, intolerance and so on. We are prone to fall into these sins, and because of that it is so important for us to always remain alert and stay vigilant.

(3) The Third Enemy: The Devil.

The third enemy is the devil. The devil is our real and present enemy, who has tremendous power and intends to devastate the faith of each one of us. Satan is determined to ruin our lives by whatever means necessary. We will be held captive by Satan to do his will if we do not know what it takes to beat him. It is stated in the Scripture that the devil has many different faces; sometimes he comes close to us as “a roaring lion.”

Be clear-minded and alert. Your opponent, the devil, is prowling around like a roaring lion, looking for someone to devour. - 1 Peter 5:8.

On some other occasions, he tempts us as “an angel of light.”

Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light. - 2 Corinthians 11:14.

Therefore, it is absolutely necessary to be aware of the intentions of Satan. Paul once said:

After all, we are not unaware of his intentions. - 2 Corinthians 2:11.

We have to learn how we can hold out against Satan, and make him turn his back to us.

This world, the flesh and Satan will never let us rest for a moment. Our lives will be ruined if we fail to remain alert and stay vigilant all the time. Therefore, these commands from the Lord are extremely important: “Stay awake! Always be careful so as not to be deceived by Satan!” How can we defeat these enemies in our daily lives? We need to remain alert, stay watchful, be always awake, and never let ourselves fall asleep.

Now, let us discuss the second requirement.

2. Be Strengthened in Faith.

“Stand firm in your faith.” This is another clear command. It appears in other parts of the Scripture.

Therefore, my dear brothers, be steadfast, unmovable, always excelling in the work of the Lord, because you know that the work that you do for the Lord isn't wasted. - 1 Corinthians 15:58.

What is important here is not just to believe, but to stand 'firm' in your faith. It is to be strengthened by your trust in the Lord.

Once, I saw a picture in a newspaper of a student reading a book. He was wearing a pair of glasses and looked very intelligent. And I was impressed by the caption beneath the picture: “Success does not belong to those who begin to study, but to those who continue to study with the same enthusiasm.” How are we in this regard?

As the battle becomes more fierce, and the attacks increase in frequency and intensity, we clearly see our defeat and feel helpless, which exposes us to the danger of losing all hope. However, we have a foundation which gives us the strength to continue the battle instead of giving it up. Our foundation is the fact that the command of the Lord is given to us: “be steadfast, unmovable, always excelling in the work of the Lord.” And, this command given to us because the Lord will make it possible for us.

The above verse is taken from chapter 15 of the First Epistle, “the book of resurrection.” This letter describes in detail the contents of the gospel as well as the truth and glory of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. It also mentions that the people connected with the Lord through their faith will resurrect. Furthermore, this chapter refers to the second coming of the Lord Jesus Christ, as well as victory over death and Hades.

It is absolutely necessary for us to be steadfast in faith and remain unmovable. Now, what is the foundation, which supports our inner conviction that makes it possible for us to stay in the faith, to be steadfast and remain unmovable? It is the words of the Lord. What we should rely on is the great promise of the Lord. When we are commanded “stand firm in your faith!”, we need to realize clearly that there is no other foundation of our faith other than the words of the Lord. It is not what we think, what we feel, or what we consider the truth, but it is what the Lord tells us that is absolutely crucial for us to remember. Paul wrote the following in his letter to Timothy:

Do your best to present yourself to God as an approved worker who has nothing to be ashamed of, handling the word of truth with precision. - 2 Timothy 2:15.

Very often, people strain the meaning of what is written in the Bible; that is to say, they interpret the Bible at their discretion. Actually, all kinds of “Biblical criticism” are based on intentional misinterpretation of scriptural messages. It is wrong to pick up specific verses and interpret them in the favour of the readers, ignoring their relationships with other parts of the Bible. It is not that we are supposed to judge the words of the Lord, but that the words of the Lord will judge us and prepare us for his service.

Now, there is another meaning in this expression, “stand firm in your faith,” which is that we need to “continue to trust the Lord.” Do not allow yourself to yield to temptations and ordeals. Even when you are challenged by various troubles and worries, and you have to endure unacceptable pain, please do not lose your trust in the Lord.

The main target of the devil's attack is our faith. The devil tempts us by all means so as to prevent us from trusting in the Lord. On many occasions, we cannot fully comprehend what the Lord does. Very often we are dismayed at being unable to understand the reasons why the Lord allows many horrible things to happen in our lives. We think very hard, but cannot understand the idea behind them. We all have such experiences. Nevertheless, we still need to stand firm in our faith. The Lord does what he does and forgives what he forgives for a reason. The foundation of our faith is the words of the Lord

and the promise of the Lord. "Because God has said, (now, nothing else matters,) I will never leave you or abandon you." Hence, we must listen to these promises of the Lord, which are the sole foundation of our faith so we can confidently say, "The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid. What can anyone do to me?" (Hebrew 13:5-6).

In order for us to share in the victory of the Lord, first of all, we need to stay watchful all the time, and remain alert, so as not to fall asleep. Secondly, we should continue to be strengthened through our trust in the Lord. The foundation of that trust is the truthful words of the Lord. We can trust him completely based on what we have read in the scripture. The Lord is the one who would never let us down.

Now, let us move to the third point.

3. Continue to Grow and Become Completely Matured.

With the teaching to "keep on being courageous," we are encouraged to grow up and become mature; in other words, it is to mature into adults in the true sense. A question arises here. How long has it been since we belonged to the Lord Jesus? Are we still immature children in our spiritual domain?

When I was a child, I spoke like a child, thought like a child, and reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I gave up my childish ways. - 1 Corinthians 13:11.

This was a confession by Paul. But, how do we confess? Have we "given up our childish ways?" According to the Bible, signs of immaturity can be seen in "jealousy and quarreling" (1 Corinthians 3:1-3). Maturity brings about unity among the believers.

...until all of us are united in the faith and in the full knowledge of God's Son, and until we attain mature adulthood and the full standard of development in the Messiah. - Ephesians 4:13.

The important thing is to reach unity in the faith, to reach unity in the knowledge of the Son, Jesus Christ, and to become completely mature. Then, how can this be possible? How can we be strengthened by our faith, attain true mature adulthood, and live a life of faith as adults instead of spiritual infants?

It has been clearly revealed to all of us already that these things can never be accomplished by our own strength alone. Why are we defeated repeatedly? It is because we try to achieve the victory on our own. Our defeat is proof that we acted on our own instead of obeying the guidance and work of the Holy Spirit of the Lord. We are defeated as a consequence of trying to accomplish something on our own that is totally impossible. There is absolutely nobody who is

strong enough to lead a life of victory on their own. That is to say, while we need to give the Lord Jesus an opportunity to work on us in order for him to infuse his own life of victory into us, we attempt to lead a life of victory on our own instead. Not me, but the Lord Christ who dwells within me; this is the secret of the victory.

Let us move to the fourth point, taking into consideration the meaning of the next command to us, "keep on being strong."

4. Rely and Depend on the Lord Jesus Alone.

"Rely on nobody but the Lord Jesus and depend on him." We will be blessed if these words are kept in our mind at all times. All efforts to accomplish these things on our own are totally meaningless. As long as we live in this world, we will never be free from the influence of this world and the worldly spirit. It is not possible for us to change and overcome our corrupt nature on our own. It is absolutely impossible for us to confront the devil and defeat him by relying on our strength alone. It was for this reason that Paul wrote in his letter to the Ephesians:

Finally, be strong in the Lord, relying on his mighty strength. - Ephesians 6:10.

Nowhere in the Scripture are we encouraged to make our best efforts and strengthen ourselves. The Bible, rather, tells us to be strengthened in the Lord, and to become strong relying on the almighty strength of the Lord Jesus. Paul further emphasizes the absolute importance of taking up the whole armor of God in order to become the victor of this warfare.

For this reason, take up the whole armor of God so that you may be able to take a stand whenever evil comes. And when you have done everything you could, you will be able to stand firm. Stand firm, therefore, having fastened the belt of truth around your waist, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and being firm-footed in the gospel of peace. In addition to having clothed yourselves with these things, having taken up the shield of faith, with which you will be able to put out all the flaming arrows of the evil one, also take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. - Ephesians 6:13-17.

We need to fasten the belt of truth around our waist and put on the breastplate of righteousness. And, we need to be prepared to proclaim the gospel of peace. We also have to make sure to take up the shield of faith. What is absolutely imperative for us is the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of the Lord.

Nobody has to be miserably defeated anymore. We

have been defeated once because we tried to defeat our enemy on our own. The devil sneers at our meaningless efforts. Let us never rely on ourselves anymore. How can we share in the victory of the Lord Jesus?

It is made possible by;

1. staying alert and remaining watchful all the time.
2. trusting the words of God and relying on the Lord.
3. ceasing acting as children, but growing up to become adults.
4. under all circumstances, avoiding only relying on ourselves.

Then, finally, let us look at one last thing which is also very important.

5. Do Everything in Love.

“Everything you do should be done lovingly.” It is more important than anything for us to do everything in love and to be filled with the love of the Lord God. The love of God has to be clearly shown in our lives. The love of the Lord God needs to be revealed through our deeds and needs to be heard in the words we speak. How is this possible?

...because God's love has been poured out into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us. - Romans 5:5.

According to this verse, all those who have been born from above are given the love of God by the Holy Spirit. The Bible states that the Holy Spirit is given to all believers and the fruit of the Holy Spirit is love. In order for us to become filled with the love of the Lord God, our hearts first need to be filled with the Holy Spirit. All Christians should be characterized by this love.

I am giving you a new commandment to love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. This is how everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another. - John 13:34-35.

We have discussed the road that leads to the life of victory, and it is extremely important to put what we learned herein into practice. If we are determined to do so, our lives will be different and we will be filled with great joy. Then, the Lord Jesus will surely begin to use us in the service of his honor and glory.