

How to Teach the Victorious Life

Meade MacGuire

The Necessity of Victory

There are many sins which all of us believe must be stopped before the sinner is prepared for translation. We all affirm that the drunkard, the adulterer, the murderer, the thief, must overcome these sins or be lost. We do not allow him to stop gradually or give him so many years or months in which to gain the victory, but we say, "You must stop at once." The question is, Can he stop at once? If so, why cannot any and all sins be stopped at once? It is usually the so-called little sins that persist. But if the great ones can be stopped at once, why not the small ones? Thousands of people are tired of habitual sinning and long to stop, but they do not know how.

"All who profess godliness are under the most sacred obligation to guard the spirit, and to exercise self-control under the greatest provocation. . . . The strongest temptation cannot excuse sin. However great the pressure brought to bear upon the soul, transgression is our own act."—*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 421.

"There is no excuse for sinning. A holy temper, a Christlike life, is accessible to every repenting, believing child of God."—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 311.

Furthermore the standard set before us is absolutely unequivocal, and is so simple and plain that it need not be misunderstood.

"As He which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation; because it is written, Be ye holy; for I am holy." 1 Peter 1: 15, 16.

"I saw that none could share the 'refreshing,' unless they obtain the victory over every besetment, over pride, selfishness, love of the world, and over every wrong word and action."—*Early Writings*, p. 71.

"Not one of us will ever receive the seal of God while our characters have one spot or stain upon them."—*Testimonies, Vol. V*, p. 214.

Therefore, victory is not a matter of choice, it is an absolute necessity.

The Field of Conflict

When we speak of victory over sin, we necessarily imply a conflict or struggle. Some confusion may be avoided if we state clearly the two realms of possible conflict, and the elements which enter into defeat or victory.

First, there is the battle against sin. The greatest disappointment and failure come to thousands because of the mistaken notion that we must fight against our sins with a view to making ourselves free, and thus, alone, or with God's help, obtain the victory. If this were true, victory would be a matter of attainment on our part, rather than a matter of faith. But the Lord says: "By grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast." Eph. 2 : 8, 9.

Victory was won by Christ; we receive it as a gift, and maintain it by faith in the indwelling Victor.

Is there then no temptation, no struggle, no conflict, on the part of the true believer who accepts victory in Christ by faith? Most assuredly there is. But this is not in fighting to obtain deliverance from the dominion of sin. That has already been accomplished for us by Christ. It is in the realm of the will. The will is the guiding, controlling element in our personality. Through sin the human will has been perverted. Unless God can have possession of the will to cleanse and purify and direct it, victory is impossible.

“Everything depends on the right action of the will. The power of choice God has given to men; it is theirs to exercise. You cannot change your heart, you cannot of yourself give to God its affections; but you can choose to serve Him. You can give Him your will; He will then work in you to will and to do according to His good pleasure.”—*Steps to Christ*, p. 47.

Maintaining this continuous surrender of the will to God constitutes the inner battleground of the true Christian.

Two steps are necessary in order to realize the victory wrought out by Christ and offered to us as a gift. The first, as we have shown, is the surrender of the will to God.

The second is the exercise of faith in appropriating the victory in Christ. Elementary as this experience may be considered, it is apparent that many have no clear, definite understanding of exactly how to obtain the promised blessings of God by faith. A simple statement of how to exercise faith is therefore very essential:

“Prayer and faith are closely allied, and they need to be studied together. In the prayer of faith there is a divine science; it is a science that every one who would make his life-work a success must understand. Christ says, ‘What things soever ye desire, when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them.’ He makes it plain that our asking must be according to God’s will; we must ask for the things that He has promised, and whatever we receive must be used in doing His will. The conditions met, the promise is unequivocal.

“For the pardon of sin, for the Holy Spirit, for a Christlike temper, for wisdom and strength to do His work, for any gift He has promised, we may ask; then we are to believe that we receive, and return thanks to God that we have received.

“We need look for no outward evidence of the blessing. The gift is in the promise, and we may go about our work assured that what God has promised He is able to perform, and that the gift, which we already possess, will be realized when we need it most.”—*Education*, pp. 257, 258.

Victory, therefore, is the result of surrender and faith.

The Promise of Victory

In the fourteenth chapter of Isaiah is a thrilling description of the inception of sin in the universe. It came through the wrong exercise of the will. In a similar manner man transgressed and introduced sin into our world. Thus man’s will became depraved and enslaved to sin. Sin is our master. Christ came to set men free. Manifestly this deliverance must come through man’s choice. So the Saviour said: “Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whosoever committeth sin is the servant of sin. ... If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed.” John 8:34-36. “Ye will not come to Me, that ye might have life.” John 5 : 40.

The method of deliverance is indicated by Paul: “Know ye not, that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are to whom ye obey; whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness?” Rom. 6: 16. Having thus yielded, or surrendered the will to God, He says, in verses 18-22, they were “made free from sin.”

There is no uncertainty as to the promise of victory to those who meet the conditions. Jesus came to save His people, not from the wages of their sins, but from sin itself.

However clear and convincing the presentation of the promises and method of victory, a very definite preparation is necessary if it is to accomplish its purpose. This preparation consists of —

Genuine Conviction, Repentance, and Confession of Sin

There can be no deep appreciation of the atonement of Christ unless there is a clear understanding of the awful nature of the evil which made the atonement necessary. There is today a startling absence of real conviction of sin that makes men loathe and abhor it. Too many are endeavoring to live with Christ without dying with Him, but Paul says: "If we be dead with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him." Rom. 6:8. Daily dying to sin and living for God, is the victorious life.

The Miracle and Significance of a New Nature

One can hardly deal with hundreds of church members in a personal way without the profound conviction that far too little emphasis has been placed on the doctrine and experience of the new birth. Through the miracle of regeneration a new nature is introduced into the life. This means far more than accepting a message or embracing a creed, however true they may be. "If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new." 2 Cor. 5: 17. "Whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world." 1 John 5: 4.

Victory for the natural man is hopeless. "They that are in the flesh cannot please God." Rom. 8: 8. Our only hope, therefore, is to be born from above, thus becoming "partakers of the divine nature." 2 Peter 1: 4.

Of all the great doctrines of the Bible, the atonement of Christ comes first, embracing what God has done for men.

The next great doctrine is justification, righteousness, and sanctification, or the victorious life, all by faith, which embraces what God does in man. All the other doctrines cluster around or have their center in these. To believe all other doctrines without entering into these two, avails nothing.

Faith and Acceptance

It is possible to present the theory of the new birth without making the way of realization plain and simple. The spirit of prophecy says in the book "Education," "How to exercise faith should be made very plain." Many depend largely upon feeling, and to them victory is impossible, for victory is all of faith.

Nothing could be clearer than the way this is presented in *Steps to Christ*:

"You are a sinner. You cannot atone for your past sins, you cannot change your heart, and make yourself holy. But God promises to do all this for you through Christ. You believe that promise. You confess your sins, and give yourself to God. You will to serve Him. Just as surely as you do this, God will fulfil His word to you. . . . Do not wait to feel that you are made whole, but say, 'I believe it; it is so, not because I feel it, but because God has promised.'"—Page 51, *pocket edition*.

Those who grasp the simplicity of receiving pardon for sin and justification from its condemnation by this simple act of faith, should now be able to see that deliverance from the power and *dominion* of sin is received in exactly the same manner. Christ promises pardon. Confess your sins and believe, and you are forgiven. He also promises deliverance. Receive Him and claim freedom. It is so if you believe it. "This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith."

It is possible to have victory over some habitual sin, or even many of them, and yet not have victory over "the last one." It is hardly necessary to say that no such thing as complete victory can be expected unless one utterly and from his heart renounces every known sin.

"Real piety begins when all compromise with sin is at an end. . . . Yielding to temptation begins in permitting the mind to waver, to be inconstant in your trust in God."—Thoughts from the Mount of Blessing, 136,137.

We need to remember that while Christ won the victory for us once for all, we can have complete victory only as we appropriate it by faith day by day and moment by moment.

The temptations of the enemy, the natural inclinations of our bodies deeply marked by hereditary tendencies and actual practice of sin, we must meet each moment. To yield to Christ instead of our sinful nature, to appropriate His victory instead of trying to win ours, is a constant and often fierce battle, but it is through this conflict that character is developed.

All in Christ

It is evident that when man sinned and became a slave to evil, he could never free himself. Sin had become his nature, and sin could never overcome sin. It was for this very reason that Christ came in human flesh to win the victory in man and for man that man could never gain for himself.

“Thanks be unto God, which always causeth us to triumph in Christ,” 2 Cor. 2: 14. Christ is in every one of His disciples. “Know ye not your own selves, how that Jesus Christ is in you, except ye be reprobates?” 2 Cor. 13 : 5. Yet even after have accept Christ, there will not be continuous victory unless the will is continuously yielded to Him. This is the supreme secret of the victorious life. Let us sum it up in four statements :

We are to renounce every known sin.

We are to open the heart and let Christ in, and then constantly recognize His presence.

We must yield our own will every moment to Him.

We must claim His victory by faith, and reckon ourselves safe in His keeping.

This being true, victory is not a matter of growth, education, or evolution, but of faith, and is ours the moment we meet the conditions and thank God for deliverance and freedom in Christ.

“By His perfect obedience He has made it possible for every human being to obey God’s commandments. When we submit ourselves to Christ, the heart is united with His heart, the will is merged in His will, the mind becomes one with His mind, the thoughts are brought into captivity to Him; we live His life. This is what it means to be clothed with the garment of His righteousness.”—*Christ's Object Lessons p. 312.*

DISCUSSION (*A discussion followed during which various attendees commented on MacGuire's remarks.*)

M. E. KERN: The great problem with me is to know these truths first of all for myself, and then to be able to present them so simply and so clearly to our struggling young people that they also may be led to lay hold upon victory that is in Christ. This problem comes to me in the inquiry-room and by letter. I will read a portion of a letter which puts the question in a very definite way:

“I know that God has not yet forsaken me. I have entertained the thought that sometime the good traits in my character would become stronger than the bad ones, and that I should thus obtain perfection and at last be saved; but knowing myself as I do, I have lost all hope of ever becoming perfect enough to live with sinless beings. It is absolutely beyond my power. It is since I have lost all hope of ever saving myself that I am beginning to understand and appreciate the wonderful truth that Jesus lives in us and meets our temptations for us, if we rightly relate ourselves to Him.

“But now there is one part I do not fully understand, and it is a very important part: How shall I open my heart to Jesus so He can really live in me? I haven’t the faith necessary to grasp His promises, but I want that faith. There have been times when I have wanted to do right when I almost wished I didn’t want to, but now I want to want to. And I wish that in some manner God would perform a miracle on my nature, and give me an ‘abiding, peaceful trust.’ I no longer have the violent ups and downs I once had, but I am still so uncertain.”

I believe that letter represents the unspoken thoughts of a great many young people, and I have hoped that this discussion this morning might give us all a better understanding of this victorious life and how to teach it.

I think where I have made a mistake has been in a lack of sympathy for young people in their struggles. If some of us have been years coming to a full knowledge of this victorious life, can we be hard on our young people and unsympathetic if they do not come to it at once? It seems to me we must preach the ideal, but be patient and persistent and sympathetic in our efforts to bring these young people to understand the real key of the situation, and to take this step.

One place where I think our young people misunderstand is that after they have accepted this victorious life and accepted Christ, they feel that it is a sin to encounter temptation. So many make that mistake. Here is a statement which has brought hope to me: “There are thoughts and feelings suggested and aroused by Satan that annoy even the best of men; but if they are not cherished, if they are repulsed as hateful, the soul is not contaminated with guilt.”—*Review and Herald, March 27, 1888.*

I have endeavored to emphasize this fact that temptation is not sin, and also the thought of perseverance in our efforts to reach this victorious life if we have not already attained. As Robert F. Horton says near the close of his little book, *Victory in Christ*:

“Finally, victory is his who will not accept defeat; who, having failed in holiness, does not despair, but returns to the cross; who, having been disappointed in prayer, continues to pray; who is resolved, however sinful and worthless his life seems to him to be, to trust Christ to redeem it, to endow it with worth, and to die, if die he must, at the foot of the Redeemer’s cross.

“This is the victorious life — the life eternal.”

C. H. WATSON: This is a subject that concerns not merely us, but the people of God everywhere. I believe we must find a real practical solution of the problem of sin in our lives. As I have traveled, meeting various people, I have grown to feel we must understand better what victorious living means. We must know in a very practical way how to teach it so that those who are constantly defeated by sin may claim victories and know Jesus Christ as their personal Saviour.

We shall know victory only as we seek it more earnestly than ever before. We can have it only as we place ourselves in constant contact with the Word. I know by experience that my life is victorious while in contact with that Word, and defeated when that contact is broken.

I am thinking of one who knows nothing about the theory of victorious living, but I know of no man preaching with greater power than is that man among his people. He is able to resist the temptations that come day after day, and I know of no one whose voice is heard with such effect as that man’s. He is a black man down in the Solomon Islands. His name is Pana. When people bring their sick and he prays for them, they are healed. Up to the last I heard there had not occurred one case where Pana had petitioned God but that power had come and healing had been sent. It is time we had victory with God. It is time that power came. It is time it should be no longer said that our prayers are not heard at the throne of God.

F. M. WILCOX: There is danger of our presenting the victorious life as an ideal apart from what it really is. The complement of preaching is practice.

W. L. ADAMS: The young people sometimes wonder if the victorious life is a theory or if it is something tangible. I think we help them to get hold of it by comparing it with the physical life. Just as we must have food and breath in order to live physically, so we must have spiritual food and spiritual breath. Then we can build up a strong spiritual body.

G. W. WELLS: We must go to our young people with a message of hope. We must let them know that God will not condone sin, but that He will lift them out of it.

J. F. SIMON: The facts that have been presented call upon us to humble ourselves before God. It is not difficult to get our young people to respond to these messages; but if you visit the same young people a few months later, you will find their experience has gone down. It is that up-and-down experience in a great many of our churches and institutions that we need to study. It must be possible for us not only to lead our young people into this experience, but we must lead them to maintain the victory by a life of obedience to the gospel truth. I have wondered if we have neglected the mighty truths of the advent message as we have spoken to the young people. I wonder if in our teaching of the victorious life we cannot get back to those convictions in connection with the clear and striking statements of the advent message. I think it was the presentation of the judgment message that laid hold of my heart when I was a boy. It does seem that that message which kept our fathers in the faith and loyal to the message, should be able to hold our young people in this terrible tide of apostasy and wickedness that is surrounding them in the world.

A. G. DANIELLS: I believe with all my heart that Professor Simon has touched the way. The way is so simple that the uneducated, our good old fathers and mothers who have had little advantages in the world, can find it. It is so simple that poor, illiterate heathen can find it and live it. I believe that we as a body of Seventh-day Adventist leaders are guilty before God in this thing of neglecting to get our spiritual life from the Word of God day by day and from the messages of the spirit of prophecy, and from much prayer alone with our God. I feel like suggesting that we kneel down here and pray God to burn this into our hearts. What is the use of talking if we do not make the application?

At this point Elder Daniells led the convention in prayer.

M. E. KERN: I should like, in closing this session, to read a statement from the spirit of prophecy. I presume we all understand that this message is the message of justification by faith, and Sister White has said,

“Justification by faith . . . is the third angel's message in verity.”— *Review and Herald, April 1, 1890.*

G. W. WELLS: There is a statement I have here from the *Review and Herald of Nov. 15, 1887*. I think it is a splendid word to give to some of our young people as well as the older ones:

“At times a deep sense of our unworthiness will send a thrill of terror through the soul; but this is no evidence that God has changed toward us, or we toward God. No effort should be made to rein the mind up to a certain intensity of emotion. We may not feel today the peace and joy which we felt yesterday; but we should by faith grasp the hand of Christ, and trust Him as fully in the darkness as in the light.

“Satan may whisper, ‘You are too great a sinner for Christ to save.’ While you acknowledge that you are indeed sinful and unworthy, you may meet the tempter with the cry, ‘By virtue of the atonement, I claim Christ as my Saviour. I trust not to my own merits, but to the precious blood of Jesus, which cleanses me.’”

M. E. KERN: Here is another statement by the spirit of prophecy:

“The righteousness by which we are justified is imputed; the righteousness by which we are sanctified is imparted. The first is our title to heaven, the second is our fitness for heaven.”— *Review and Herald, June 4, 1895.*

Meade MacGuire (1875-1967) was a prominent Adventist leader and author. In 1891, when he was 16 years old, he organized a youth society at his home church in Antigo, Wisconsin, which eventually developed into the Missionary Volunteer Society. In 1903 he served as a pastor in Colorado. In 1907 he joined the Young People's Department at the General Conference. In 1913 he became a field secretary of the General Conference. In 1924 He became the Assistant Secretary of the Ministerial Association, working closely with A. G. Daniells to spread the message of righteousness by faith. He authored four important books on the topic; The Life of Victory, His Cross and Mine, Lambs Among Wolves and Does God Care, as well as other smaller publications and articles. Those attending his revivals and ministerial institutes were greatly blessed by the practical and Christ-centered messages he presented.

Meade MacGuire's presentation on teaching victory was made June 7, at the early morning session of the World Convention of the Educational and Missionary Volunteer Departments of the General Conference of Seventh Adventists held at Stratton Park, Colorado Springs, Colorado June 5 to 19, 1923