

# HOW TO BE AN OVERCOMER AND HOW TO PREVENT SIN

*WHY are we not more successful in living up to God's standard? WHY do we slip and fall occasionally? Here is how YOU can overcome where you are weakest and hardest tempted!*

by Herbert W. Armstrong (1892-1986)

**DO** you have some "besetting sin" – some point of weakness, perhaps secret, you have been unable to overcome?

Have YOU ever met temptation, struggled with it, only to wake up a little later to the remorseful fact that you had slipped, and failed to overcome?

Or perhaps you are struggling with some habit that holds you as its slave – struggling, wrestling, always fighting it, yet somehow never able to conquer it.

## ***Only the Overcomers***

These things are serious. We **MUST** overcome these sins, these habits, these sudden temptations – be cleansed of them thoroughly – if we expect to inherit eternal life.

"To him that **OVERCOMETH**," says Jesus, "will I grant to sit with me in my throne".

"He that **OVERCOMETH**, and keepeth my works unto the end, **TO HIM** will I give power over the nations; and he shall rule them with a rod of iron." (Rev. 2:26-27; 3:21).

Not all are even called, now. Many, though they may have **HEARD** the true message, have never received a conscious convicting **KNOWLEDGE** of the truth. This is not the time when God is calling them.

But God is now calling **SOME** to a life of separation – to a new and different and Spirit-filled and Spirit-led life – in order that they may be wholly **CLEANSED** of sin, and that they may **GROW** in grace and knowledge, thus being prepared, trained, fitted for a position of solemn responsibility – that of king or priest – in God's **KINGDOM**! And it is **ONLY** those who qualify by the training, the overcoming, the spiritual development and growth, **DURING THIS PRESENT LIFE**, who shall thus reign with Christ. Study the parable of the pounds, in Luke 19:11-27.

So the Christian life is a new and a different life – an **OVERCOMING** life. Sin must be torn out, root and branch. We must be made righteous, holy.

## **Why We Stumble and Fall**

Why, then, do so many of us continually stumble and fall? Yes, even those who do strive, struggle, and even PRAY, and PRAY for help, for victory, over some vicious habit? WHY?

First, notice a portion of Paul's instruction to the Philippians.

"And be found in Him, not having mine OWN righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness WHICH IS OF GOD BY FAITH" (Phil. 3:9).

Notice, it is not OUR righteousness, but GOD'S.

David was inspired to write: "All thy Commandments are righteous-ness." (Ps. 119:172). Yes, and LOVE is the fulfilling of the law (Rom. 13:10).

## **The Kind of Love Required**

Right here is one trouble. Too many Commandment-keepers are struggling along, trying to keep the Commandments in their own power and strength – thinking it is THEIR own personal human love that fulfills the Law!

Too many "Commandment-keepers" have only been converted to the ARGUMENT of keeping God's Commandments, and have never really EXPERIENCED definite salvation – for a real conversion is a DEFINITE EXPERIENCE! Such people need to go to a private place, alone with God, and get to their knees, and pour out their hearts to God, and stay with it until they really KNOW they are converted by GOD'S POWER, and have received His blessed Holy Spirit!

No wonder so many become continually discouraged, and feel like giving up!

We do not even HAVE the kind of love that fulfills God's law and makes us righteous! LOVE is of God, for God IS love! And it takes "the love *OF GOD*, shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit" (Rom. 5:5), to fulfill the law, make us Commandment-keepers, and give us GOD'S RIGHTEOUSNESS.

The law is SPIRITUAL (Rom. 7:14). We are carnal. It takes a SPIRITUAL love to fulfill a spiritual law. The Holy Spirit within us is merely GOD'S LAW *IN ACTION!* And since God alone can supply the LOVE that makes us righteous, it becomes GOD'S righteousness, not ours.

## **How to Get Faith**

But how do we receive this LOVE? Note again the Scripture quoted above: "... the righteousness which is of God *BY FAITH.*"

It comes, then, by FAITH. Now most people seem to believe that the FAITH, by which we must receive everything God gives us, is something that we, ourselves, must work up

and supply, by some kind of hard effort. And it does become SUCH AN EFFORT, doesn't it, trying to strive to have FAITH?

Foolish babes in Christ! Can't we see that if WE were able to supply the faith which brings all else that we, ourselves, would earn our own salvation by WORKS? It would be the kind of righteousness that is only FILTHY RAGS to God!

Stop trying to work up faith. You have no faith. The Scripture above speaks only of THE FAITH OF CHRIST! Not YOUR faith – CHRIST'S faith. Jesus had REAL FAITH! He performed miracles! And he rose from the dead – and HE LIVES.

Here is the secret! He gives – He imparts – HIS strong faith to you and to me! Yes, even FAITH is a gift of God – one of the spiritual GIFTS (Eph. 2:8; and 1 Cor. 12:9).

Then how shall we go about getting more of it? By yielding, submitting our desires, our purposes, our wills, to HIM, by ASKING Him in real earnest persevering prayer, and by trusting Him to give it!

God's Word promises: "There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; BUT WILL, WITH THE TEMPTATION, also MAKE A WAY OF ESCAPE, that ye may be able to bear it" (1 Cor. 10:13).

But has it not often seemed, in your experience, that God has failed to keep this promise? Temptation has come. You have struggled, even prayed, yet you were overpowered, and you did not find the way of escape!

Then what is wrong?

Jesus said: "I will NEVER leave you nor forsake you."

"I am with you always, even unto the end of the world."

God's Word promises, "Sin shall NOT have dominion over you." Yet have you not found that sin has had DOMINION over you, holding you its slave?

Have you not fought it desperately, even with tears streaming down your face – only to fail?

### **How to *Apply* and Use Faith**

WHY? What is wrong? Simply that we have not known how to receive, apply, and use the FAITH God promises to give!

First, there is something WE must do. Some go to one extreme and try to do it all. Others swing to the opposite extreme, plead with God, make little effort themselves, and expect Him to do it all.

James says "SUBMIT yourselves therefore to God. RESIST the devil, and he will flee from you" (James 4:7).

Submit! Resist! This takes effort.

Peter says to humble ourselves, casting *ALL* our care upon the Lord, and to be sober and *VIGILANT*; because the devil is walking about, watching for the chance to tempt us when we are off our guard: "whom RESIST, steadfast IN THE FAITH" (1 Peter 5:6-9). We are to resist Satan, and do it in the faith of Christ – but HOW?

The key to it all is "BE VIGILANT." Be on your guard! Be ever watchful! Be prepared! That's where we fall down! It takes constant, continuous, vigilant effort, never letting down!

Unless we, ourselves, had to put forth some effort we could not be *OVERCOMERS*! But if we had power to do it all, we should not need God! So it requires our effort – our continuous, watchful, ever *VIGILANT* effort – *EMPOWERED BY GOD'S SPIRIT!*

James continues: "Draw nigh to God, and He will draw nigh unto you" (James 4:8). Now we are getting closer to our answer! When temptation comes, we *ARE TOO FAR FROM GOD* – and we are then unable, *SUDDENLY*, on the spur of the moment to get close enough to Him to get the help and the deliverance we need!

It sometimes takes *TIME* to get *CLOSE* to God – into that intimate contact with Him so that we can draw on Him for the power we suddenly need!

In other words, when temptation unexpectedly has come, we have found ourselves caught off guard – out of prayer – out of contact with God – *OUT OF SPIRITUAL TRAINING!*

You were entering a *CONTEST* with Satan. You tried to wrestle with him, but you were *OUT OF TRAINING*, out of spiritual condition.

Suppose a prize-fighter would suddenly find himself, untrained and unprepared, in the ring in a contest with the world's heavyweight champion! Do you think any living man could win? How much *STRONGER* is Satan, by comparison! No wonder we fail! Could such a fighter, who had been dissipating, carousing, weakening himself physically, *SUDDENLY* summon enough strength and skill to conquer the champion of the world? Could a mile runner run a successful race, and win, unless he trains, and trains, and prepares himself carefully for the race – unless he is *IN CONDITION* when it comes?

We can no more win these *SPIRITUAL* battles when out of *SPIRITUAL* training. All spiritual power and strength must come from God. We can drink it in from Him, only when we are *IN CONTACT* with Him – close to Him – in communion with Him!

And, when the temptations suddenly assail you, no matter how hard you then try, or cry out to God for help, you are simply *TOO FAR AWAY FROM HIM* to get help!

Spiritual training, to get and KEEP in constant vigilant condition to meet the foe of temptation and sin requires CONTINUOUS, EARNEST, PERSISTENT PRAYER!

That is why we are commanded so often to PRAY WITHOUT CEASING! To KEEP IT UP!

If we draw nigh to God, and then KEEP close to Him, our problem will be solved. We will then have the FAITH. We will then be continually FILLED with His Spirit – His power to overcome.

We can keep in spiritual training only if we keep our affections – our minds – our thoughts – on SPIRITUAL things. Read Colossians 3:1-10. Most of us keep our minds filled with earthly, material cares and interests, turning to the spiritual only occasionally! "Seek FIRST the Kingdom of God and HIS RIGHTEOUSNESS!"

Sometimes it takes a siege of FASTING AND PRAYER – earnest, DETERMINED, PERSEVERING PRAYER – seeking God with all our might – with weeping – staying with it, DETERMINED, until we get through. Then we must keep in CONTINUOUS prayer. Cast ALL our cares upon HIM. We are not doing that. If you do, there will be many things a day to pray about! And it takes daily PRIVATE prayer, in real earnest, besides family or public prayer. Is eternal life WORTH IT? *bf*

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### *How to Prevent Sin*

by Herbert W. Armstrong (1892 - 1986)

**Y**OU realize that if it is wrong to DO a certain thing, it is wrong to harbor THOUGHTS of that thing in your mind?

"ALL have sinned", says the Scripture.

What IS sin, anyway?

Satan ought to know – and he is the invisible influence who sways the course of this world. Hollywood is considered by many as the world's mecca of sin. On the newsstands in Hollywood may be found a very worldly booklet, written in a very light, "breezy", and satirical vein, titled "How to Sin in Hollywood". It gives a very worldly definition of sin – perhaps the definition of the very Devil who devotes his time to enticing people into it. The definition is expressive, and not far from the truth. Here it is: "Sin is THINKING THOUGHTS you ought not to be thinking about, things you ought not to be DOING while you are THINKING that kind of THOUGHTS."

God's definition is: "Sin is the transgression of the law" (1 John 3:4). The law of "LOVE", as defined by the Ten Commandments. Jesus said: "That which cometh out of

the man, that defileth the man. For from within, OUT of the heart of men, proceed EVIL THOUGHTS adulteries, fornications, murders, thefts, covetousness [violations of the law – the Ten Commandments] ..." (Mark 7:20-22).

"ALL have sinned", says the Scripture. And what man – especially what Christian, is there who has not time and again experienced the struggle against sin described by the Apostle Paul? "What I would, that do I not; but what I hate, that I do would not, that I do." Who is there who has not LOST that struggle, perhaps many times?

Of course no man, of himself, can live above sin. "With men it IS impossible," said Jesus, "but with God all things are possible." And Paul continues (Rom. 8) to show that the only DELIVERANCE from this body of death is through Jesus Christ, and the indwelling power of God's Holy Spirit – "that the RIGHTEOUSNESS of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God."

Yes, but we have OUR part in it, too. And it all centers in the MIND.

Repentance of sin means, literally, to CHANGE one's MIND in respect to sin. If we repent, and accept Jesus Christ as Saviour, the promise is we SHALL receive the gift of the Holy Spirit ... "and be renewed in the Spirit of YOUR MIND" (Eph. 4:23) – the presence of the Holy Spirit is the RENEWING of THE MIND.

How does sin actually happen? "... every man is TEMPTED when he is drawn away of his own lust [desire], and enticed. Then when lust [the desire IN THE MIND] hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death" (James 1:14-15).

The TEMPTATION is in the MIND. When you THINK about the thing that tempts you – let your mind dwell on it – turn it over in your mind – whether it be a desire to GO some place, to DO something, or to HAVE something you know is wrong – that THINKING ABOUT IT finally conceives – leads to ACTION – and breeds SIN. You finally DO the thing you kept thinking about, wanting to do. If you keep thinking about it, after a while you'll be UNABLE to resist it. That's why you've lost so many of these struggles against sin – you kept THINKING about it, desiring it, wanting it.

The way to prevent sin is to let God's Spirit fill the mind. "Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth" (Col. 3:2).

The way to put a thing OUT of the mind is to put an OPPOSITE thought IN the mind. So often I have noticed parents of babies strive so hard to "shush" up the baby when it is crying in church. There's something in the baby's mind that is causing its crying or fretting. Just saying "shush!" or commanding the baby to stop fussing doesn't usually get very good results. We have raised four children, and long ago I learned the trick of quieting the baby by GETTING ITS MIND ON SOMETHING ELSE. Instead of commanding it to stop crying, attract its attention with some new object – get it interested

in playing with that object (I have often used my fountain pen with excellent results) – and before you know it the child will forget all about its crying.

Try using this same method on yourself. But instead of material or worldly things, a mature person should use self-discipline and set his mind on spiritual things. Open your Bible. Put the study of some SPIRITUAL subject in your mind. Next time you are tempted, try it. Pray over it. Ask God to help you. See how rapidly you begin to win the victory over temptation and sin, and how marvelous will be your spiritual and CHARACTER growth.

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