

THEOLOGY OF VICTORY

By

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The burning issue of all history is the purpose of God. Where men understand the purpose, they recognize that it is being accomplished, they share in its victory and their faith is strengthened; but where man's own ambitions are mistaken for the purpose of God, victory seems remote and faith diminishes.

God's purpose, first given in types and shadows then announced by the prophets, was finally revealed through Jesus Christ by His death and resurrection (II Tim. 1:9–10). This purpose, however, is seen by unregenerate man as foolish in comparison to the great schemes and ambitions of man. This should be no surprise because "the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men" (I Cor. 1:25). The ungodly cannot understand that God is being victorious at a time when men's hopes and plans are all going down the drain. God is concerned with judgment and salvation. God, as Creator, is responsible for all mankind and therefore must be the one to whom all are accountable. The late Bertrand Russell revealed that he sought refuge in evolution because he and his colleagues, admittedly libertarians, refused to acknowledge that there was a God to whom they must account. On the other side, Daniel Webster, when asked, "What is the greatest thought you ever had?" answered, "My accountability to God." Accountability means judgment, and judgment means death to all who do not measure up to the image of God. Judgment does not mean getting one's wrist slapped nor does it mean spiritual exile or perpetual torture, but death — death from which there is no return, described in scripture as eternal and everlasting.

It is against this solid and inexorable background that Christ came to the world with the good news that He would die the death for man, thus taking away man's sin, guilt and ultimate execution in the judgment. In His death Christ revealed the consequences of sin by undergoing that consequence Himself. By resurrection He demonstrated victory over death by One who was without sin. The entire purpose of God for humanity is revealed in this gospel: that man may have his sins accounted for through Christ's death that he might be victorious over sin and death, to live forever.

The singular purpose of Christ for coming into this world was to gain victory over sin in His own life that He might win victory over sin and death at the cross for all believers. Because he understood God's purpose, Paul announced, "I determined to know nothing among you, save Jesus Christ and him crucified" (I Cor. 2:2). For this same reason scripture tells us that it was "God's good pleasure through the foolishness of the preaching to save them that believe" (I Cor. 1:21). The preaching is that which exposes the good news of Christ's death and resurrection. If there were something more important in God's purpose, it is reasonable to assume that God would have required us to preach that instead of preaching the cross. If this, the victory over sin and death, was the purpose of Christ's life and death and if it is to be the subject of God's messengers, then the greatest purpose for man surely must be victory over sin and death.

SOCIAL VICTORY. For three quarters of a century or more, many leaders in the western world have held Christianity as a culture catalyst, the means by which the world

should be improved in all areas until the whole globe is civilized, prosperous and peaceful. This had been the postmillennial view and the gospel of the liberals. Premillennialists, who are in predominance at the present hour, see the gospel as saving from sin but with the immediate object being readiness for the “rapture”, the onslaught of anti-Christ and then a thousand year golden age of peace and prosperity. The “gospel-millennialist”, a term we prefer to “a millennialist”, sees the purpose of Christ and His gospel to be victory over sin for the believer that he might be one with Christ now and forever. There will be no peace and prosperity on a worldwide basis, but continued warfare against Satan right down to the end of the world. The peace Christ gives is a peace which the world does not understand and cannot give. Jesus said “My peace I give unto you: not as the world gives, give I unto you” (John 14::27). Christian prosperity is prosperity of the spirit. God gives to some power to get rich, even including some saints, but commands all of us to be content with what we have whether or now we attain earthly riches and, in fact, to be careful that we are not covetous nor deceived by riches of the world.

Victory does not mean the defeat of our nation’s enemies nor the gaining of lands, nor gaining power over other people. Christ gained victory when He overcame sin and death and sat down with the Father. He makes the promise, “He that overcomes, I will give to him to sit down with me in my throne, as I also overcame, and sat down with my Father in his throne” (Rev. 3:21). We are victorious when we overcome the world, the flesh and the devil, and put our complete reliance in Christ rather than in the world. We share in His victory, for He “raised us up with him, and made us to sit with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus” (Eph. 2:4–6).

In all the writings of the apostles there is nothing concerning victory of one nation over another, nothing whatever about the victory of any political ideology, nothing about any kind of financial victory and not even the promise of a great victory for the church converting the whole world to Christ or turning nations from communism to Christianity. Instead, the apostles saw the victory as a personal victory over sin and its final power, death.

Victory does not depend upon national or worldwide culture change nor upon the defeat, in a political or national sense, of anti-Christ powers. Victory and power belong to Christ now and every Christian is completely victorious when he is a complete Christian. From the time of Christ’s ascension victories have been continuously won on earth through the power of Christ’s death and resurrection and by the application of the believer’s faith.

THE EXTENT OF VICTORY. All true changes in culture must begin with the individual. Laws and economics do not change men but rather men change laws and economics. The best laws and economical system in the world are worthless as long as men are left in bondage to Satan and sin. No better example could be found than our own beloved United States. We started out with a great document, the constitution. We had and still have resources, both natural and human, enough to be the most prosperous and happiest nation in the world. We have never suffered invasion or destruction by outside forces. Yet we face a breakdown in society, in law and order, in economy, in the family and a breakdown in the individual the like of which few nation have ever experienced. Why? Because of the breakdown in persons, the failure of individuals to maintain their integrity. The breakdown is nothing but the personal defeat of individuals.

To get back on the right road there must be individual victory, the personal conversion of individuals. When a person is truly converted to Christ a victory is realized all along the line. In his politics he upholds God's law in trying to bring human law to conform to God's will. In the sciences he harmonizes with the master instruction book, the Bible. In the family he brings the will of God to bear on all attitudes, decisions, and relationships. In school he upholds the truth, unafraid of the pressure because he abides in Christ and stands in him. Christ's kingdom does not grow the way worldly kingdoms grow and does not gain its victory as do earthly institutions and worldly powers. It is like a mustard seed which grew large enough for the birds of the heavens to lodge in its branches. Jesus said that "the seed is the word." The word is the gospel, the death and resurrection of Christ whereby men gain victory over sin and its consequences. As this word is preached and expressed by Christians it produces the fruit of faith and brings forth victory. The kingdom comes not by observation, nor by marching armies, nor by sensational statements from the White House, nor decisions of the supreme court, nor legislation from Capitol Hill. When Christians look to the headlines and compare themselves with the wise and noble of the world they will always feel the stigma of defeat. As Paul said, "Behold your calling brethren that not many wise after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble are called: but God chose the foolish things of the world that he might put to shame them who are wise, and God chose the weak things of the world, that he might put to shame the things that are strong; and the base things of the world, and the things that are despised did God choose." Christ our Champion did not win victory as a governor, a senator, a general nor an emperor, but as a sinless Savior.

Through the ages the Christian has not looked to see whether victory is coming his way through the natural powers and by the natural processes of human endeavor, but he has looked to God and realized the victory even when he was being overwhelmed by persecution and oppressed by his enemies. In fact, it is just during such times of trial that the victory over sin becomes the most pronounced, and this is the victory Christ have to the world to win.

Victory is not measured by the number who join the winning side. The way to life is a narrow way and few travel thereon, but the broad way to destruction is crowded with the multitudes. Jesus once asked "When the son of man comes will he find **the faith** on the earth?" (Luke 18:8). This indicates that Christ does not expect a great revival where a large proportion of the world will become Christian. How can this be victory? God is victorious in two ways. 1) In bringing all believers to salvation by having their sins accounted for in Christ and his death. 2) God is victorious in judgment when He will triumph over and destroy all sin and sinners who have rejected the victory that Christ won. Victory necessarily means defeat for the opposite side. Those who receive Christ stand with God in His victory so that in the end all is victory and God is all in all (I Cor. 15:28).

Victory of the gospel does not require that the nation make Christianity the state religion. Where this has happened the truth of Christ has suffered and it has been necessary to restore it by the bloody sacrifice of the reformers! The gospel gives victory over sin and death in the midst of a hostile world, not a victory that removes world conditions, but a victory within and in spite of those conditions. Clearly it is God's intention that man's energy and life be devoted to the progress of this gospel. Man changes the world, not by taking the reigns of government into his hands to manipulate

other men, but by presenting the gospel to these men that they may have victory over sin and its consequences. Love, justice and benevolence prevail only where individuals have won the victory through faith in Christ.

The theology of the cross is a theology of victory.

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