

Living Victoriously

Whenever I teach, I have to warn those who have never heard me before, that I only have two speeds. Full speed and dead stop. I get excited about these things! Whenever I read the passages from the Bible, I can't help but jump up and down, and run around my house shouting, "Yahoo! Yippee!" There is so much life in these words!

Look at this:

So how do we fit what we know of Abraham, our first father in the faith, into this new way of looking at things? *If* Abraham, *by what he did for God*, got God to approve him, well then he could certainly have taken credit for it. *However*, the story we are given is a God-story, not an Abraham-story. What we read in Scripture is, "Abraham entered into what God was doing *for* him, and that was the turning point. He trusted God to set him right instead of trying to be right on his own." [The NIV says that Abraham trusted God, and it was *credited to his account* as righteousness—right standing with God].

Lets think about that a moment. If you are a hard worker and do a good job, you deserve your pay; we don't call your wages a *gift*. *However*, if you take a look and see that the job is too big for you, that it's something only God can do, and you trust him to do it—well, that is a different story. Trusting-him--to-do-it is what gets you set right with God, by God. It is a sheer gift.

David confirms this way of looking at it, saying that the one who trusts God to do the putting-everything-right without insisting on having a say in it is one fortunate man:

Blessed are those whose crimes are carted off, whose sins are wiped clean from the slate. Blessed are the persons against whom the Lord does not keep score.

[Well I should suppose so! What a wonderful understatement!]

Do you think for a minute that this blessing is only pronounced over those of us who keep our religious rules? *Or* do you think it possible that the blessing could be given to those who never even heard of our rules, who were never brought up in the disciplines of God?

Now, would you agree with me that it was by embracing what God did for him that Abraham was declared fit before God?

Now, before you answer me, I want you to think about it: Was that declaration made before or after he was marked by the covenant rite of circumcision?

That's right, before he was marked.

That means that he underwent circumcision *as evidence and confirmation* of what God had done long before to bring him into this acceptable standing with himself; it was an act of God that he embraced with his whole life.

[isn't that the same with our Baptism? When you were baptized—did you then receive eternal life—Zoë—the life and nature of God?—or, were you baptized *as a response* of what God already did in your life?]

lets go a little further with this: Abraham is father of all people who embrace what God does for them while they are still on the "outs" with Him. It is precisely these people—in this condition—who are called "set right by God and with God"!

That famous promise God gave Abraham—that he and his children would possess the earth—was not given because of something Abraham did or would do. It was based on God's decision to put everything together for him, which Abraham then entered when he believed.

If those who get what God gives them only get it by doing everything they are told to do and filling out all the right forms properly signed, that eliminates personal trust and turns the promise into an ironclad contract!

That's not a holy promise; that's a business deal. A contract drawn up by a hard-nosed lawyer and with plenty of fine print only makes sure that you will never be able to collect. *However*, if there is no contract in the first place, simply a promise—and God's promise at that—you can't break it.

This is why the fulfillment of God's promise depends entirely on trusting God and his way, and then simply embracing him and what he does. God's promise arrives as pure gift. That's the only way everyone can be sure to get in on it, those who keep the religious traditions and those who have never heard of them. For Abraham is father of us all. He is not our racial father--that's reading the story backwards. He is our faith father.

Abraham didn't focus on his own impotence and say, "It's hopeless. This hundred-year-old body could never father a child." Nor did he survey Sarah's decades of infertility and give up. He didn't tiptoe around God's promise asking cautiously skeptical questions. He plunged into the

promise and came up strong, ready for God, sure that God would make good on what he had said. That's why it is said, "Abraham was declared fit before God by trusting God to set him right." But it's not just Abraham; it's also us! The same thing gets said about us when we embrace and believe the One who brought Jesus to life when the conditions were equally hopeless. The sacrifice of Jesus made us fit for God, set us right with God. (Romans 4:1-25)

THEREFORE, [I love that word. It is used to introduce a logical conclusion] Therefore—because of all those things we just read about—SINCE we are justified, acquitted and given a right standing with God through faith, *let us grasp the fact that we have the peace of reconciliation to hold and to enjoy*—peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.

[People are always talking about “making peace with our maker” —Hey! The peace has already been made. If you are feeling restless and nervous about meeting your *maker*, then do something about it. He isn't angry at you any more—the peace has already been made!]

Through Him we have our access into this grace in which we stand.

Moreover we can be full of joy now! . . .

For if because of one man's trespass death reigned through that one, much more surely will *those who receive God's overflowing grace and the free gift of righteousness* will reign as kings in life through the one Man Jesus Christ. (Romans 5:1-3; 17)

Phillips translation says they will live their lives victoriously

The NIV says that those who Receive his abundant provision of Grace and of the gift of righteousness, *reign in life*.

Amp: *Reign as Kings in life!*

--more than conquerors

--lead us always into victory—or triumph

This is supposed to be the norm for Christians, but we often feel that that passage mocks us. The problem is that we see where we should be—but often we feel like failures—rejected.

“I wish I was there”

“Oh, to reign in life”

“Oh, if only I could be an overcomer, more than a conqueror”

Yet we are still called to live a life of victory!

Victory over sin
Victory over our past
Victory over sickness
Victory over our weaknesses

Sometimes we might come to a particular crisis in our lives where we are forced to face up to our failure. We stand face-to-face with our failures and say, “Lord, I really want to do better for you.” We look back and see that’s really not the standard we want to live by—“Oh, Lord, I really want to reign in life—“Lord, I **really** will do better this time!”

But it is at a moment like that—a moment when we realize what we ought to be, that we fail to see what that verse says about “Reigning in life.” We don’t read the fine print.

We are thinking, “I **will** reign in life, bless God!” “I **will** be more than a conqueror!” We pull up our bootstraps and set out to reign and conquer . . .

“Okay . . . so what shall I do about it?
I’ll set my alarm clock an hour earlier
I’ll read my Bible through in one year
I’ll witness to one person every day

I’ll pull up my spiritual socks and get it together!

In other word . . . in order to reign in life—the way we respond is to think of all the things we need to do—all the special endeavors we can make

—a new set of rules
—a new-years resolution
—I **will** reign in life, bless God!

However, that is a fatal error!

We’re being called out to a greater life and we come to two doors. One is marked *Grace* and the other is marked *Law*.

Unfortunately, many of us, when we hear this call up—we tragically go through the door marked: Law

If I try harder, I can reign in life
If I can fulfill these laws I’ve written for my life, then I’ll reign in life

What we find it that our resolutions and laws only last a few days (we are law breakers by nature) and then we feel condemnation and feel like failures again.

When we make that commitment to do better, it proves we failed to read the fine print!

If you can understand what I am about to share with you, it will revolutionize your life. It will free you from heaviness and the vulnerability to Satan's accusations and condemnation.

We don't reign in life by our performance—but rather by our position!

There are two clues in this text for reigning in life:

“For if because of one man's offense [speaking of Adam] death reigned, all those who receive the abundance of Grace and the free gift of righteousness will reign in life—will triumph over sin and death”

1. By the abundance of Grace—[Grace: God's ability to do what we don't have the ability to do]
2. By the free gift of righteousness [standing as if you never sinned]

Get that? We don't reign in life by performing harder, by being better. No! Those who receive the abundance of Grace and the free gift of righteousness will reign in life!

We become Kings because of our position

In England they have a Prince Charles and one day he will become King Charles III, and it will have nothing to do with his being a good Prince. It has nothing to do with his performance. It wholly depends on his position. He is born to reign and he understands his identity.

So what does it mean to have abundance of Grace?

“Sin will have no dominion over you since you are not under the law but under grace.” (Romans 6:14)

“You who would be justified by the law have fallen away from grace.” (Galatians 5:4)

“Christ is the end of the law to everyone who believes” (Romans 10:4)

Are we under the law? (Yes or No)

The law said: “Obey!” Yet offers you no assistance. It says, “Obey!” then folds its arms and looks at you.

That's a lot of pressure on you, isn't it? Especially when the thing it is commanding you to do or not to do, is the thing that is the greatest weakness in your life.

So what has Grace done that the law couldn't do?

Well, the Law said, “Obey!”
Grace says, “I’ll help you obey.”

There are a lot of laws that you haven’t been able to obey—“Well, Nick—if I struggle hard enough, I’ll be able to obey them.” That’s funny, Jesus said to “cease from your own labors and enter into rest!”

“How in the name of the Lord will I be able to obey the Word of God when I cease from my own abilities and enter into rest? Don’t I have to struggle the good struggle of faith?”

Does Grace say don’t obey the law? God forbid! (Romans 6:2)

Grace does not cover your sins, it exposes your sins. Grace is not an excuse to continue to sin . . . it’s God’s ability to overcome sin!

A sin that is your greatest weakness becomes your greatest strength—and you will overcome even the weakest area of your life.

So what is it about the law that hangs us up, so much?

You shouldn't have any trouble understanding this, friends, for you know all the ins and outs of the law—how it works and how its power touches only the living. For instance, a wife is legally tied to her husband while he lives, but if he dies, she's free. If she lives with another man while her husband is living, she's obviously an adulteress. However, if he dies, she is quite free to marry another man in good conscience, with no one's disapproval. (Romans 7:1-3)

We were all married to the Law—it was our husband!

It is also a very demanding husband. He is always pointing out where we are wrong, yet he never lifts a hand to help and not only that, he is always right! (How infuriating). Also, while you are married to the law, you can’t be married to someone else! “As long as you both shall live”

You are permanently married to an overbearing; faultfinding; totally correct; never helping husband—And, he is never going to die!

So, my friends, this is something like what has taken place with you. When Christ died he took that entire rule-dominated way of life down with him and left it in the tomb, leaving you free to "marry" a resurrection life and bear "offspring" of faith for God. For as long as we lived that old way of life, doing whatever we felt we could get away with, sin was calling most of the shots as the old law code hemmed us in. And this made us all the more rebellious. In the end, all we had to show for it was miscarriages

and stillbirths. But now [Oh, how I love that phrase: But Now!] now that we are no longer shackled to that domineering mate of sin, and out from under all those oppressive regulations and fine print, we are free to live a new life in the freedom of God. (Romans 7:4-6)

Did you see that? Although the Law will never pass away—WE DID! We have been discharged from the Law! We have been released from the demands of the Law!

[the law is good providing you use it lawfully—the law is not for the righteous but for the sinners]

We must understand that Christians are not under the law—we have been discharged!

[When I was discharged from the Navy, it took awhile before I was totally released from my habits and reactions. I continued to walk a particular way; talk a particular way—it had been drilled into me and was part of who I was]

Unless you understand that, you will continue to try to do things in order to please God—and you will become very vulnerable to condemnation and guilt. You will always feel that you aren't measuring up.

The Law is used by the enemy to point out our faults.

Often when someone first comes to Jesus, their burden of sin is lifted, they are released [instead of cleaning themselves up and then coming], but then some well meaning counselor tells them that they now they had to pray everyday, read their Bible everyday, witness to people they meet on the street; you must do this and this and this . . . each day, a new burden is heaped on their shoulders.

What happened? You came to Jesus—he became your new husband—you were joined to him . . . but rather than enjoying His life, you turn away and try to please Him by going back to your old husband. “I’ll do this, and this and this . . .

After awhile you start feeling convicted and condemned that you aren't keeping up with the standard that your old husband required.

Until one day, the Lord speaks to you in mercy; through a prophetic word; or a sermon like today; maybe a show on TV; and you come back to God and realize that he loves you freely—that he is on your side—He doesn't condemn you.

We say, “Is that really true, Lord? Do you really accept me? O Lord, that is really wonderful—I'm sorry I made a mess before—Glory to God I am free . . . this time I really will do better. Beginning right now, I will do this . . . and this . . .

We keep trying to please Jesus by going back to our old husband over and over and over . . .

Try that in the world—keep your new husband happy by having a really great relationship with your old husband (or boyfriend)

We have died to our old husband and you will never make your new one happy by have a relationship with your old one!

The law was an impotent husband—

“If a Law had been given which could confer spiritual life, then righteousness with God would certainly have come by Law. (Galatians 3:21) [But it couldn’t]

If the law could have said, “Don’t do such and such,” and could then impart life—Zoë, and give us the power to live it, then yes, righteousness could be by the law. But it couldn’t—it just condemned us!

We died to the law and married Jesus in order to bear fruit for God.

So if you want to please the Lord—if you want to reign in life—don’t go back to the law—don’t do it by performance—do it by getting to know Him better—so He can speak His words into your life

- they are spirit and life
- they are alive and active
- they are seeds that when planted will produce His life within your being.

—If you develop your love relationship with Him, you will bear fruit.

The Law just issued instructions and told us where we were wrong—Jesus give us Life!

Now, a logical question to ask would be if the Law was such a hopeless husband, why did God give the law, in the first place?

What then do we conclude? Is the Law identical with sin? Certainly not! [God forbid!] Nevertheless, if it had not been for the Law, I should not have recognized sin or have known its meaning. (Romans 7:7)

Get it? The Law reveals and defines sin.

The real function of the Law is to make men recognize and be conscious of sin (Romans 3:20)

The Law draws the line.

Although a conscience knows what to do—it can become confused by the society around it—so the law draws the line and defines what is sin.

Without the Law sin is dead—it is inactive and a lifeless thing (Romans 7:8)

The Law not only defines sin, it provokes sin.

“Wet Paint. Don’t Touch”

“Keep off the Grass”

“Don’t eat those cookies”

“Sure I believe in God” —until the Law is presented—“Well, I don’t believe in a God like that”

The Law also condemns sin

The Law therefore is holy, and each commandment is holy, just, and good. Did that which is good then prove fatal—bringing death to me? Certainly not! It was sin working death in me by using this good thing—[the law]—as a weapon, in order that through the commandment sin might be shown clearly to be sin, that the extreme malignity and immeasurable sinfulness of sin might plainly appear.

We know that the Law is spiritual; but I am a creature of the flesh, having been sold into slavery under the control of sin.

How can something good, cause such a problem?—it wasn’t the Law, it was my sin nature. But when you came to Jesus, that sin nature was defeated and you can now overcome it.

The Law was never meant to save us—it was meant to show us what a mess we are in. the Law is a school teacher to lead us to Christ. It draws the line. It provokes us. Then it says, “See, you can’t even do it.”

That’s why religious people are so miserable.

I’ve tried everything and nothing helps. I’m at the end of my rope. Is there no one who can do anything for me? (Romans 7:24) Isn’t that the real question?

Wretched man! The Law makes us desperate and drives us to Christ. That’s why it is so tragic to live your Christian Life through the law when it is trying to drive us to Christ.

If we are going to reign in life—don't try to do it with a bunch of rules—it will destroy you. We reign in life by understanding we are not under the law any more, we are under Grace!

Read the rest of that verse:

“Is there no one who can do anything for me? . . . The answer, thank God, is that Jesus Christ can and does . . . With the arrival of Jesus, the Messiah, that fateful dilemma is resolved.” (Romans 7:24-8:1)

Sometimes we think the Christian Life is like riding a bicycle with no chain on it . . . That's the reason for the *Abundance of Grace*! When we feel condemned, we try to get rid of it by becoming more sanctified—by living a better Christian Life.

The only answer to condemnation is justification!

When you are in Adam, you can try all sorts of things to get out of that but you can't (all our righteousness is as filthy rags)

—Adam was our fall—Christ is our righteousness

It isn't a matter of a frame of mind. That is totally irrelevant. When I was in Adam, it didn't matter how many old ladies I helped across the street, or how much money I gave to wine-o's , I was still in Adam . . .

Now I'm in Christ—the implications are astounding—I can go down and push old ladies out of the way—Does that take me out of Christ? No! He would be very disappointed in me, but he doesn't disown me, either!

This might be the most dangerous teaching you have ever heard. That's why Romans 6 starts the way it does:

So what do we do? Keep on sinning so God can keep on forgiving?
God Forbid! Of course not! Certainly not! By no means!

Shall we continue to sin? The implication is that you are forgiven—righteous! So of course this is dangerous teaching—its lethal!

“So it doesn't matter what I do . . . I am still righteous?” Yes! God calls you righteous and that settles it. However, if your attitude is to try to see how much sin you can get away with before God catches up with you . . . don't worry, you don't have the Life of God in you—keep on doing what you've been doing. Because a person who has the very life and nature of God residing inside is not trying to find a way to get away *with* sin—they're trying to find a way to get away *from* sin!

I can think of two responses to a teaching like this . . .

The first one is saying, “Well, then I will just ignore my sin . . .”

No! No! No!

Accept responsibility for your sin! Adam blew it in his disobedience but compounded the problem by hiding his sin—don’t run *from* God when you sin, run *to* him. I always told my kids that if they will confess what they did before I find out, I will always have mercy—however, if I find out first . . .

“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”

My hope is that “you won’t sin, but, if you do, we have one who speaks to the Father in our defense.”

Don’t ignore your sin, but don’t let it cripple you, either! The Bible says:

You are buried with Christ (Romans 6)
You are born-again
You are recreated
Old things passed away . . .

The second response might be that you take the attitude that says, “I might as well not do the righteous things . . . I won’t pray; I won’t evangelize; I won’t study my Bible . . .”

No, that’s not the right answer, either. But why do you do these things? What is your motivation for praying and doing works of mercy? If it is out of *obligation*, then sure, don’t do them. *However*, if you desire to know your Father; if you want to be used by your Father; if you want to work with him, as his ambassador on this earth . . . then all those “things” will help you know your Father, to be used by him, to work with him . . . all those things will bring rich rewards of fellowship and wisdom.

Amen? Amen!