

Overcoming Ourselves

After so many failures, how can we have a realistic hope of overcoming the sin that so easily besets us?

Spirit leads (Romans 8:13 – 14) For if you live according to the flesh you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God.

Spirit helps (Romans 8:26) Likewise, the Spirit also helps our weaknesses. For we do not know what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit makes intercession with groaning which cannot be uttered.

Spirit strengthens (Ephesians 3:14 – 16) For this reason I bow my knees to the Father from whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man, that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and depth and height – to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

Spirit transforms (2 Corinthians 3:18) But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit.

Many teach that we will always be beset by sin, but that the blood of Jesus continually cleanses us. This is a possibility, but implies that God has declined to fix us, but rather has decided to leave us in our self-imposed weakness. These passages state the opposite:

Romans 8:29 For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be **conformed to the image of His Son**, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren.

1 Corinthians 11:1 Be **imitators** of me as I am **of Christ**.

1 Peter 2:21 - 22 For you have been called to this purpose, since Christ also suffered for you, **leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps**, who committed no sin, nor was any deceit found in His mouth.

Romans 6:7 For **he who has died is freed from sin**.

Hebrews 2:14 Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, He Himself likewise shared in the same, that through death **He might destroy him who had the power of death**, that is, the devil.

Ephesians 4:22 – 24 That you put off, concerning your former conduct, the old man which grows corrupt according to deceitful lusts and **be renewed in the spirit of your mind** and that you put on the new self which was created according to God in true righteousness and holiness.

The temptation to rationalize these promises comes when we are unsuccessful at this transformation. Some common explanations are:

Greater self discipline needed. Colossians 2:23 These things indeed have an appearance of wisdom in self-imposed religion, humility, and neglect of the body, but are of no value against the indulgence of the flesh.

Accept imperfection. John 17:23 I in them and You Me; that they may be made perfect in one, that the world may know that You have sent Me, and have loved them as You have loved Me.

The tools God has given us in order to be transformed have been corrupted by both of the above attitudes, turning the tool into a rule, or into a rationalization. Some tools are:

Believing our potential (2 Corinthians 5:17)

Believing our importance (Ephesians 3:10)

The Word (Hebrews 4:12, 2 Thessalonians 2:15, Acts 20:32, 2 Corinthians 3:7 – 18)

Singing (Ephesians 5:18 – 21, Colossians 3:16)

Prayer (1 Thessalonians 5:17, Romans 12:12, Colossians 1:9 – 12, 1 John 5:16)

Time Management (Ephesians 5:15 – 16, Colossians 4:5, Romans 8:18 – 25)

Conscious Thought Control (Philippians 4:8, Ephesians 4:25 – 32, Colossians 3:12 - 15)

Love (Romans 5:5, 1 John 4:12 – 13)

Fellowship (1 John 1:5 – 7, Acts 2:42, 2 Corinthians 13:14, Philippians 2:1, Philemon 6, Hebrews 13:16)

Teaching (Hebrews 5:12)

Evangelism (2 Corinthians 3:18, 4:7, 4:13)

Giving (2 Corinthians 8:4 – 7)

Suffering (1 Peter 4:12, James 1:3, 2 Corinthians 12:9)

The key to all of these tools and promises is faith, which also has been corrupted into rules or rationalizations. The tools above are not means by which to overcome, but means by which to develop faith. The fundamental issue of faith is bridging the gap between the seen and the unseen (2 Corinthians 4:18). Some realizations that aid in developing that vision are:

We teach angels. (Ephesians 3:10)

Do not grieve the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 4:30)

Christians are the Temple of God (1 Corinthians 3:16, 6:19)

Lukewarm Christians make God sick (Revelation 3:16)

Failure to perform defiles everything (Titus 1:15 – 16)

God knows what we are thinking (1 Corinthians 4:5, Romans 8:27)

When we fail, our response should not be to just try harder, which is futile. Instead, we need to work on visualizing the true universe, the realm of spirits.