

Overcome. Sunday 26th January 2014

“Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.” Romans 12:21

Beloved in the Lord,

Life is a constant struggle. We are constantly in a battle field, where the forces of good are pitted against the forces of evil. It has been this way since Adam fell, and will continue until Christ returns.

During my holidays, I spent a fair amount of time watching sport, mainly tennis and cricket. I enjoy watching sport, because it is a powerful contest, where either individuals or teams battle it out. The more I observe sport, the clearer it becomes, that much of the battle is fought in the mind. Two people can have equal ability and strength, yet one wins and the other loses. The battle is often won or lost in the mind. The one who can control himself, his thoughts and stay calm and focused is usually the victor.

Every day of our lives we are in a battle that is mainly fought in the mind. We are constantly bombarded with temptations, with thoughts, with desires. We are often provoked. We are facing decisions all the time. Usually we know what the right choice is, we know what we should do, but often we don't do it. All too often we lose the battle and we give in. Paul knew all about this battle:

“For we know that the Law is spiritual, but I am of flesh, sold into bondage to sin. ¹⁵ For what I am doing, I do not understand; for I am not practicing what I would like to do, but I am doing the very thing I hate. ¹⁶ But if I do the very thing I do not want to do, I agree with the Law, confessing that the Law is good. ¹⁷ So now, no longer am I the one doing it, but sin which dwells in me. ¹⁸ For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh; for the willing is present in me, but the doing of the good is not. ¹⁹ For the good that I want, I do not do, but I practice the very evil that I do not want. ²⁰ But if I am doing the very thing I do not want, I am no longer the one doing it, but sin which dwells in me.

²¹ I find then the principle that evil is present in me, the one who wants to do good. ²² For I joyfully concur with the law of God in the inner man, ²³ but I see a different law in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin which is in my members. ²⁴ Wretched man that I am! Who will set me free from the body of this death? ²⁵ Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, on the one hand I myself with my mind am serving the law of God, but on the other, with my flesh the law of sin.” (Romans 7:14-25)

Paul is giving us a look inside his own personal battles. This is a battle that is common to all who desire to live godly lives. All who want to please God, find themselves in this conflict. You want to please God, you try to, but then all too often you fall into sin. Isn't that true?

How many of us began this year 2014 the same way we begin most years, with a set of resolutions? I am going to change some things in my life. Maybe drop some kilos, change my attitude, stop gossiping, be more patient and courteous on the road, take control of my tongue....The list maybe a lot longer. Your list maybe different to mine, but the question is how successful have you been so far? January is almost gone. How much have you achieved? I must admit I could be doing better. How about you? Life is a battle – a constant battle.

Today our text is teaching us, admonishing us: **“Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.”** This tells us that the choice is in our hands. We can allow all the evil around us to overcome us, or we can choose to overcome evil with good. We can simply drift with the tide, or we can be resolved in saying: No. I will not go with the tide, I will stand up for God and His Word, and I will overcome evil with good!

We must realise that we will not get far under our own steam. This is clear from what we read earlier where Paul described his conflict, his battle. We refer to the closing verses, because they give us the key to overcoming: ***Wretched man that I am! Who will set me free from the body of this death? ²⁵ Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!***

Paul knew that in himself, he could do nothing to change. He knew that his good intentions would not get him very far at all. He also knew that the answer was and still is and always will be – Jesus Christ. In His power, we can do all things. Paul wrote to the Philippians: ***“I can do all things through Him who strengthens me.” (Philippians 4:13)***

In Galatians he wrote: ***“I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me.” (Galatians 2:20)***

Finally, in Romans he wrote: ***“Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship. ² And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.” (Romans 12:1-2)***

All of these texts teach us the same thing, namely, that we must get rid of our old self and we must put on Christ – daily. We must be constantly reminding ourselves that we are dead to sin and alive to Christ.

A few years ago there was a popular saying amongst the youth WWJD. What would Jesus do? It reminds us to ask in every situation: What would Jesus do? This is a very healthy way to think. When someone does something bad to you stop and ask yourself: “What would Jesus do?” “Someone gossips about you, spreads vicious rumours: “What would Jesus do?” Someone pushes all the wrong buttons stop and ask “What would Jesus do?”

You know, we can go a little deeper. Not only can we ask what would Jesus do, we can allow Him to live through us. We just simply need to take the attitude of John the Baptist who said: ***“I must decrease that He may increase.”*** Allow Jesus to live through you.

This is what it means to commit yourself to Him. Not me Lord, but You. Not my will, but Yours. Your Kingdom come. Live through me. Reign in me.

When you surrender to Him, then you begin to overcome evil with good, because ***“greater is He that is in you, than he that is in the world. “(1 John 4:4)***

The very last recorded words that Jesus said to His disciples before His Ascension were: ***“Lo I am with you always to the close of the age.”*** He meant it. He is with us always, everywhere, in every situation. We are never alone. Do you realise this? Do you understand what this means? Do you live accordingly? If you surrender your heart to Jesus, from that moment on you are never alone. There is nothing that He doesn't know, or that He cannot handle. Hallelujah. Nothing befalls you without His knowledge and permission. Not a hair falls from your head without His knowledge. Wow. That blesses me. How about you?

If something seemingly bad happens, He knows, and He has allowed it. If you realise this truth then the evil will not overcome you, but you will overcome it with good. You are not alone.

I said at the outset that life is a battle, a constant struggle and it is. This struggle will end when we leave this life and see Jesus face to face. But the good news is that you are not alone in the battle. You have Jesus, the great Commander and Chief. Trust in Him.

There is nothing that can separate you from Him. Absolutely nothing. Read what Paul wrote in Romans 8 and be comforted and empowered:

“³¹ What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who is against us? ³² He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him over for us all, how will He not also with Him freely give us all things? ³³ Who will bring a charge against God's elect? God is the one who justifies; ³⁴ who is the one who condemns? Christ Jesus is He who died, yes, rather who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who also intercedes for us. ³⁵ Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? ³⁶ Just as it is written,

***“For Your sake we are being put to death all day long;
We were considered as sheep to be slaughtered.”***

³⁷ But in all these things we overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us. ³⁸ For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, ³⁹ nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”(Romans 8:31-39)

May this truth be written on your hearts.

Amen.

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All Bible quotations taken from New American Standard Bible.