

WHY MANY OF GOD'S PEOPLE CONTINUE TO STRUGGLE WITH SIN AND DISCOURAGEMENT

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Many of God's professed people continue to struggle with sin and become discouraged because they are not seeing victory over sin in their lives. Now there are numerous reasons why Christians continue to struggle with sin. Lack of faith being one. Lack of truth and knowledge of God being another. A lack of love for Christ also, as well as other reasons like focusing too much on this life, career, house, money, entertainment, etc. But in this study I want to focus on one particular element. An element that many are afraid of - human effort and the CORRECT understanding of this. Now I can already hear some crying "*Human effort?? Works! Works! That is a works based salvation!*" No. I am not talking about God's free gift of salvation. I am talking about what should come next - **overcoming** through faith. Something that MANY struggle with.

Now if our human effort is alone, or we are trusting in our human effort, then it will come to nothing, just like it did for the Jews as Paul confirmed in Romans 9:31-32. They "*followed after the law of righteousness*" but did not attain to it, because they sought it not by faith. In other words, their human effort was **apart** from God's divine power. But if that human effort is UNITED with divine power through faith, and we are trusting in that divine power of God to overcome, THEN we will be overcomers. But many are putting forth little to no effort, which is a problem, as God will **never** force anyone to be obedient to His will and commands, which is why we must be willing co-workers with God, co-operating with Christ, putting forth human effort and uniting it with divine power by faith. Take a look at the account of Jacob in the wilderness:

*Genesis 32:24,26 ...'And Jacob was left alone; and there wrestled a man with him until the breaking of the day ... And he said, let me go, for the day breaketh. And he said, **I will not let thee go, except thou bless me.**'*

Did Jacob put forth any human effort to hold onto Christ? Yes! It took all his strength to hold on. BUT, look at what Jacob was **trusting** in while holding on ... "*I will not let thee go, except **thou bless me.***" Do you see? Jacob wasn't trusting in his own effort of holding on, even though he put forth every human effort. He was trusting in God's blessing. So Jacob was truly putting forth human effort, but uniting it with divine power and only trusting in that divine power to succeed. Thus Jacob was renamed - Israel (vs.28), because he had prevailed

by uniting his human effort with divine power. And this is something many of God's people are missing today. They "believe" in the divine power of God, but are making no effort themselves, and God will never use His divine power to force anyone to obey Him. We must be **willing** participants, putting forth every effort, as Jacob, and uniting it with God's divine power. THEN we can be called Israel (overcomers) too!

Luke 13:24 ...'Strive to enter in at the strait gate: for many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able.'

If you look at the meaning of the word 'strive' in the above verse from Jesus, comparing it with other verses that use the same word, you will see that it means to 'fight,' to 'labour fervently,' to 'make every effort.' Does that sound like we take a back seat and just put our feet up "believing" in Jesus to make us overcomers? No, never! Anyone who puts forth little to no effort doesn't understand or appreciate what Christ has done for them. And why did Christ say that many will 'seek' to enter in the strait gate and not be able to? Look at what He said in verse 27. They are "workers of iniquity." They didn't truly appreciate what Christ had done for them. They wanted the 'easy,' 'wide' road and were not willing to make any effort or sacrifice in turning from their sins and errors. This is so important to understand. But it must be understood correctly.

Colossians 1:28-29 ...'Whom we preach, warning every man, and teaching every man in all wisdom; that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus: Whereunto I also labour, striving according to his working, which worketh in me mightily.'

The apostle Paul also gives us the true formula above. Is Paul saying that Christ does everything and we do nothing? No. Paul puts forward the true formula of human effort united with divine power. And notice that Paul doesn't give credit to his own labouring and efforts. He gives the credit to the working of Christ in him, because if we put forth the effort, uniting with Christ, abiding in Him (John 15:4-5), trusting in His power, then Christ will do HIS work in us. Yes, our own works are as filthy rags (Isaiah 64:6), which is why we cannot trust in our own efforts. But that does not mean we should NOT put forth human effort. For without it, God has to FORCE us into obedience, and that destroys the order of free will that God has given us all.

Does it require human effort to diligently study God's Word? Yes. Does it require human effort to fall on our knees whenever we are tempted and pray for strength to overcome that temptation? Yes. Does it require human effort to keep focusing on Christ each and every day, each and every hour? Yes. But do you see what that human effort is actually RELYING upon? **Christ and His divine power to make us overcomers.** This is the key formula that many are missing today, and why many of God's people are still languishing in sin and discouragement.

We must put forth that human effort, just like Jacob, all the while **trusting only** in God's grace and power to save!

1 Timothy 6:11-12 ...'But thou, O man of God, flee these things; and follow after righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, meekness. Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life, whereunto thou art also called, and hast professed a good profession before many witnesses.'

2 Timothy 4:7 ...'I have **fought a good fight**, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith.'

Does it take effort to flee from something? Yes. But what or who are we feeling TO? Christ. And the meaning of "following after righteousness" in 1 Timothy 6 means to actively **pursue**, to **seek eagerly**. Does that take effort? Yes. And look at what Paul calls a true life of faith - it is a **FIGHT; a good fight**. A life that "**lays hold**" on eternity, just like Jacob laid hold upon eternity when he was putting forth all his effort to keep hold onto Christ. Human effort uniting with and only trusting in God's divine power through faith. This is the key!

2 Peter 1:5-10 ...'And beside this, **giving all diligence**, add to your faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge; And to knowledge temperance; and to temperance patience; and to patience godliness; And to godliness brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness charity. For if these things be in you, and abound, they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. But he that lacketh these things is blind, and cannot see afar off, and hath **forgotten** that he was purged from his old sins. Wherefore the rather, brethren, **give diligence** to make your calling and election sure: for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall:'

Do you see what Peter is saying above? What does it mean to "give all diligence"? It means you are putting forth every effort towards something, which Peter here says is the addition to our faith and growing in character. But look at what he says. Those who lack these things have **forgotten** that they were purged from their old sins by the blood of Christ. Which means, if we are not diligently seeking after these things and growing in them, making every effort through faith, we have left our first love and have forgotten what Christ has done for us. Or we might not have even comprehended in the first place. Here is wise counsel to help remedy this:

*"It will do you good, and our ministers generally, to frequently review the closing scenes in the life of our Redeemer. Here, beset with temptations as He was, we may all learn lessons of the utmost importance to us. It would be well to spend a thoughtful hour each day reviewing the life of Christ from the manger to Calvary. We should take it point by point and let the imagination vividly grasp each scene, especially the closing ones of His earthly life. By thus contemplating His teachings and sufferings, and the infinite sacrifice made by Him for the redemption of the race, we may strengthen our faith, quicken our love, and become more deeply imbued with the spirit which sustained our Saviour. If we would be saved at last we must all learn the lesson of penitence and faith at the foot of the cross. Christ suffered humiliation to save us from everlasting disgrace. He consented to have scorn, mockery, and abuse fall upon Him in order to shield us. It was our transgression that gathered the veil of darkness about His divine soul and extorted the cry from Him, as of one smitten and forsaken of God. He bore our sorrows; He was put to grief for our sins. He made Himself an offering for sin, that we might be justified before God through Him. Everything noble and generous in man **will respond** to the contemplation of Christ upon the cross." (Testimonies for the Church, Volume 4, p.374)*

Hebrews 6:10-12 ...'For God is not unrighteous to forget **your work and labour OF LOVE**, which ye have shewed toward his name, in that ye have ministered to the saints, and do minister. And we desire that every one of you do **shew the same diligence** to the full assurance of hope unto the end: **That ye be not slothful**, but followers of them who through faith and patience inherit the promises.'

*Galatians 5:6 ...'For in Jesus Christ neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision; but faith which **WORKETH BY LOVE.**'*

Do you see what our human effort and work is? It is a **work of LOVE**. This is why Peter said in 2 Peter 1 that those who do not seek after those character additions to their faith have **forgotten** what Christ did for them. They have left their first love (Revelation 2:4), or haven't truly fallen in love with Christ in the first place. The human effort we are to put forth and the works we do are of LOVE to God and to Christ. They are the FRUIT of faith and love towards God.

If you make little to no personal effort, then you do not truly love nor know Christ.

So are you still languishing in sin or discouragement? Do you want to be an overcomer? Then you must learn to love God with all your heart by learning what He has done for you through His beloved Son Jesus Christ. And you must learn that there is human effort to be made on your part. But that human effort itself can never change you or save you. You must unite it with the divine power of Christ, trusting in His power alone to save to the uttermost (Hebrews 7:25).

*1 Corinthians 15:58 ...'Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that **your labour is not in vain in the Lord.**'*

If you put forth effort, all the while uniting with and trusting in divine power for the works of Christ to be done in you, you will not labour in vain! Think of nature. Some plants and crops grow very easily without much care. But it is the Lord that enables this. It is the same with some sins. They fall away very easily when we come to Jesus Christ. But certain plants and crops, although blessed by the Lord, need a diligent tilling of the soil and constant careful watch and watering. It is the same with some sins. They do not so easily fall away from our lives. So just as those certain plants and crops need putting forth extra effort to grow successfully, so do certain sins need diligent effort on our part in putting them away. But just as the effort in growing those certain plants is united with our trust in God's blessings, so is the personal effort in putting away sin. **There must be personal effort.** But it must be united with divine power through faith to succeed.

*"For sinful men, the highest consolation, the greatest cause of rejoicing, is that Heaven has given Jesus to be the sinner's Saviour ... He [Christ] saw that man had become so weakened by disobedience that he had not wisdom or strength to meet the wily foe, and this is why the Son of God takes upon himself man's nature, and, gaining the victory in our behalf, **brings to us divine power, that, combined with human effort, will enable us to overcome.**" (The Review and Herald, March 15, 1887, par.10)*

Now the reason many become discouraged is because they keep focusing on their own failings. They look too much at self and not enough to Christ. But what is the counsel of God?

*Isaiah 45:22 ...'**Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth: for I am God, and there is none else.**'*

There is only one thing we will see if we focus on ourselves, and that is failure. This is why we are to look unto God in Christ, for in Him is our only hope of salvation and overcoming sin. And by 'beholding' Christ day by day, instead of ourselves and own failures, we will see the victories of Christ which will give us the encouragement and strength we need. So let us look to Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith (Hebrews 12:2) who is able to save us unto the uttermost!