

Freedom from the Formulaic Imagery of the Victorious Life

"But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Cor. 15:57).

Patrick J. Griffiths from *"The Deception of Doing"*

How often have you heard someone state "ten" steps to the victorious Christian life? Or "five" steps to living in victory? Large segments of Christianity have reduced victory to conforming to a certain predefined set of rules. This is a return to a works-based acceptance before the Father. This is legalism. Who would have ever thought the idea of the victorious Christian life would have to be freed from such legalistic tendencies?

In what way has legalism slipped into our thinking with regard to living the victorious Christian life?

First, we tend to turn our thoughts and ideas into goals to be reached. With the desire to reach the goal, there is an equally strong inclination toward formulizing the means to that goal. In so doing, we become step oriented. This is a strongly legalistic tendency.

The goal, however, is something that is unattainable in this life. We pursue Him, but what He fully is for us and we are in Him will not be completely disclosed this side of the grave. Thus, we run, knowing we will not obtain all there is for us in this life.

There is equally the idea that the Christian life is something formulaic. There is a strong tendency to reduce everything to its bare minimum. "If only I do this or that, then I too will be walking in victory." However, what happens when the steps are followed, but "victory" is not the result? An introspective questioning begins as to whether or not the "steps" were adequately fulfilled. This is how hideous and seductive legalism becomes.

Second, we tend to make what we perceive as the goal the standard for measuring everything else. Non-conformity to the perceived image communicates failure and disappointment. This is a second legalistic tendency.

As soon as we say, "This is what victory looks like," we rush to push everything into that mold. This, likewise, is an expression of legalism. How many times have we judged someone for being less than what is expected, assuming that such an individual cannot surely be living the victorious Christian life. Any time we try to push people into our perceived mold we are becoming legalistic. Unity through conformity must be avoided at all costs. There is only one standard and His name is Jesus. Jesus Christ is as diversified as personalities and cultures, and as limitless as He is infinite.

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Third, peaks and valleys mark the typical Christian life. To a legalist, the defining moment of the victorious life is a peak day. Thus, everything that is non-peak is judged non-victorious. This is a third legalistic tendency. What we fail to understand is that the victorious Christian life *is* the peaks and valleys. God has yet to waste one moment of His actions in our lives. What is a peak day anyway? We typically define a peak day as the kind of day where everything goes our way. We are well rested, fed, loved, and accepted. Yet how many of those days actually exist? Why does this define a peak day? Why could not a valley day be a peak day?

How do we know if our brokenness is not the breaking up of fallow ground for the receiving of His Word? How do we know if our tears are not the watering of the seed received? How do we know as to

whether or not our trials are not the weeding of His garden? We do not know, so should we not therefore believe that this is all true? God is doing a work that is always before Him. He is not wasting a moment or an "ounce" of energy. Everything is working together for His glory and our good.

We are victorious because Christ is victorious. He imputed His victory to us. Jesus said, "It is finished!" Are we going to believe him? Or are we going to try to earn favor when He already secured it for us? Legalism is not only with reference to our initial justification but also in our ongoing sanctification and glorification. Paul makes this clear in both Galatians 3:1-6 and in Colossians 2:20-3:5. We cannot accurately assess our own "success" or the success of others. We need not even try. Believe that you are right where God would have you. Your life is a trophy of His victory. Do not let the legalistic judgments of another rob you of the peace and joy that comes with resting in the victory Christ secured in your behalf.