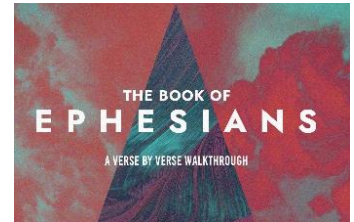


Title: Ephesians, Week 4, Keys to Spiritual Victory

Speaker: Charles Stone

Passage: Ephesians 2:1.10

Big idea: Three spiritual realities in Christ give us victory over three spiritual enemies.



How would you complete this statement? [To live a spiritually victorious life, I must...](#)

I think every believer wants to live a spiritually victorious life. But let's be real honest here. It's difficult. To be a follower of Jesus does not guarantee an easy life. In fact, following Jesus can be quite difficult and hard at times. Yet, even in our difficulty, Jesus wants us to live a victorious life. However, there are enemies that oppose and resist this victorious life that we all want.

We are in week 4 of our study of the book of Ephesians. In the section we will look at today, Paul shows us three enemies that oppose this victorious life in Christ and three spiritual realities that, when we act upon them and believe them to be true, we can experience consistent spiritual victory.



Here's today's [Big idea](#). And here's the passage we will look at today [Ephesians 2.1-10](#)

Eph. 2:1 As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, ² in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. ³ All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature objects of wrath.

⁴ But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, ⁵ made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved. ⁶ And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, ⁷ in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus. ⁸ For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— ⁹ not by works, so that no one can boast. ¹⁰ For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

Paul divides this section into two main time periods, before a person comes to faith and after a person comes to faith. He gives the bad news first, which is really, really bad, before he gives us the good news which is really, really good. He uses these words to describe a person before Christ: dead, following worldly ways, under the influence of the devil, disobedient, gratifying sinful urges, and under the wrath of God.

That is every person without Christ. This is you and me before Christ came into our lives.

Eph. 2:1 As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, ² in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world

This is not a figure of speech but an absolute statement. Every person apart from Christ is dead to God, dead spiritually. Spiritual dead people are blind to the reality, demands, and glory of Jesus. They don't love him. They are deaf to the Holy Spirit.

Transgressions and sins are similar words, with some nuance.

Transgression is a word for a slip or fall, taking the wrong fork in the road, or missing the goal, flagrantly deviating from moral principles.

A sin is an archer term for missing the mark. That mark is habitually missing what we ought to be and out to do.

So sin is not a collection of inadvertent mistakes but a conscious, willful, and deliberate deviation from God's ways, a life reflected in acts done against God's holiness and righteousness.

Sin is bad.

He gives us the first enemy to the victorious Christian life, [the World](#)

followed the ways of this world

This word is used 186 times in the Greek NT and almost always used with an evil connotation. The world represents any current social or ethical value system contrary to a biblical worldview, often outright hostile. We are living in that world today here in Canada as we see changes in legislation. We need to ask for wisdom for understanding the changes we see around us.

The world that we now live in is a world hostile to historical biblical beliefs on issues like sexuality and the importance of protecting life, whether in the womb or old age.

So, the world is the first enemy he lists, the world's systems and views contrary to God.

See if you can pick the next enemy.

and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient.

The next enemy he lists is, [the Devil](#)

In that culture, almost every object of worship by the non-Jews was related to evil spirits and demonic gods. They saw the air as the region where malicious spirits dwelled and who were under Satan's dominion.

Most Jewish people believed that Satan or the chief of the heavenly angels of the nations ran the whole world except for Israel. So, "Ruler of the Kingdom of the air" was a natural title for his dominion (IVP).

To be a ruler means a commander, captain, or chief.

Satan is real and leads a hoard of fallen angels the bible calls demons who oppose you in every way possible and seek to cause havoc in the world. One scholar called Satan the unholy spirit who constantly tries to rival the Holy Spirit.

So, to be without Christ means living according to the world's values and being under the influence and control of the evil one. That's not to say that a person without Christ is a bad, wicked, horrible, demon possessed person. They still are made in God's image and are good citizens and good workers and good friends. But spiritually, this is how Paul describes a person without Christ, how you and I were before coming to Christ: dead to God, alive to the values of the world, and under the influence of the evil one.

So, he's given two enemies thus far: [the world and the devil](#), and now he gives the third.

³ All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts.

The term is also the flesh and does not refer to our physical body, but our general inclination, our moral dynamics, our entire being oriented away from God and toward self. It's the inclination toward that which is contrary and in opposition to God. Our former self, before Christ, was dominated by this fallen nature.

We are born with a sinful nature. New birth, however, changes our overall inclination from consistently yielding to that nature to now consistently yielding to the Holy Spirit. Now, when we are staying close to the Lord, we don't habitually give in to sinful desires. We still have the influence of the flesh after we come to Christ, we still stumble at times, but we are not under its control because we have been made new in Christ.

I like this definition of the flesh by a biblical scholar.

The flesh (sinful nature) is anything in us which gives sin its chance; it is human nature without God. To live according to the dictates of the flesh is simply to live in such a way that our lower nature, the worse part of us, dominates our lives.¹ (William Barclay)

Without Christ we are at the mercy of self and its desires. With not only want to do them we do them.

Like the rest, we were by nature objects of wrath.

Because we are all born with a sinful nature, we are all tainted through and through by sin. **Totally depravity** is the theological term for this. Total depravity does not mean that we can't do morally good things or be good parents and employees and employers without Christ. It does mean, however, that a person without Christ will spend eternity apart from God in a real place called hell. At our very root, we are born sinful. Every part of us has been tainted by sin.

We all deserve eternal punishment. We don't deserve salvation. But he's about to give the good news of grace, that God willingly out of his love made a way for us to deal with sin and its effects through that grace. Jesus, His son, came to die on a cross for our sins and rose from the dead.

So, these three verses describe these [three enemies](#).



1. **World**: before Christ we did what everybody else did (ways of the world)
2. **Flesh (sinful nature)**: and we liked it (gratify our cravings and desires).
3. **Devil**: before Christ we did what the evil one wanted us to do (followed the ways of the kingdom of the air).

And sometimes Christians will let these enemies defeat them even though they are in Christ.

Take, for example, the little girl who was disciplined by her mother for kicking her brother in the shins and then pulling his hair. "Sally," said her mother, "why did you let the Devil make you kick your little brother and pull his hair?" To which she answered, "The Devil made me kick him, but pulling his hair was my idea!"²

That's the bad news. But one word turns the whole conversation around to the good news, the word b-u-t. So, the feel goes from like being in the hottest place in the US, Death Valley, to going to the Muskokas in spring, quite a contrast.

¹ Barclay, W. (2002). *The Letters to the Galatians and Ephesians* (p. 116). Westminster John Knox Press.

² Hughes, R. K. (1990). *Ephesians: the mystery of the body of Christ* (p. 67). Crossway Books.

⁴ But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, ⁵ made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved.

This verse is packed with incredible qualities of God.

We see his love; this kind of love seeks the highest good for the one loved

We see his mercy which is an emotional concern for those who experienced calamity. God has shown compassion on us who without Christ will suffer the calamity, the devastating results of sin. Don't people who are most compassionate understand pain best because they have experienced it? God has experienced the pain of His son's death because of our sin. So, he deeply understands what sin will do to us if left unforgiven and unchecked.

So, He provided a way to deal with this by extended great love, providing rich mercy, lavishing us with his grace in verse 8, all this seen through his offer of salvation. What does salvation mean?

To be saved is to be rescued from the penalty, power and presence of sin.

We have been saved from the penalty of sin

(justification)

We are being saved from the power of sin

(sanctification)

We will be saved from the presence of sin

(glorification)

⁶ And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus,

This being seated with Christ in heaven is a bit challenging to wrap our minds around. So let me try.

We kinda' live in two worlds, this earthly world and the spiritual world (heavenly realms). A believer now experiences the power of this life in Christ while still in this earthly world and in our earthly bodies, our earth suits.

Paul is writing from the backdrop of a Jewish belief that the righteous would be enthroned in the world to come. So, to be in Christ means that we have begun to experience the life of the coming age, now, in advance of that coming age.

So seated with him would imply that from this new position in Christ and with Christ, we have every spiritual benefit and thus a spiritual, heavenly power to overcome the world, the flesh, and the devil, and ultimately death because we are, in a sense, being enthroned over these evil powers. We need not fear these spiritual enemies. Our union with Christ gives us this position and privilege.

So, this living in two worlds is like an already, but not yet.

We already have been placed in Christ, yet we do not yet fully participate in his glory and the things to come because we still live in this world. We are both in the fray and above the fray.

This is a set up for what follows in these next verses to make us receptive to what he is about to say. In other words, since God has done all this for you, you should respond in this way.

⁸ For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— ⁹ not by works, so that no one can boast.

He explains salvation in this short, pithy verse. Salvation is all God's grace without human effort. It is a gift that we simply receive by faith. Faith is a trustful response to God's offer of grace and a trustful reliance on Christ for salvation that itself is evoked by the Holy Spirit. Faith is not our contribution to salvation. Faith is simply our trustful belief, our trustful response to God's grace.

It's like me sitting in this chair. I sit in it. It is not my effort that is holding me up. I don't work to hold myself up. I simply sit and trust that this chair will support me. The chair is reliable, so I trust it.

That illustrates faith, simply trusting in the one who is trustworthy. And because it is all God, we can't boast.

Then he goes the final step to rule out any semblance of human self-effort when he says not by works.

GRACE is a gift. It is the unmerited favor of God. I've liked this acrostic I learned years ago.



As a response to our gracious God, Paul shows what we do in response to God's grace.

¹⁰ For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

We were saved to serve.

God's goal of creating us new in Christ is for good works. We don't do good works to achieve God's workmanship, but God's workmanship (being created new in Christ) should result in good works. We don't do good works to curry favor with God. We don't just sit around and revel in God's salvation. We do that, but more, we do good works out of deep love and gratefulness for salvation. This is the outcome of salvation, to produce good works that attest to its reality. We show our faith by our works.

It is inevitable that love will lead to works. If we love God, we will want to serve him and do good works. Something is radically wrong if salvation does not produce good actions.

Good works are those that benefit God, ourselves, and those around us. We do good works so that we may show God's goodness and point people to Him.

James 2: 14 What good is it, my brothers, if a man claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save him? ¹⁵ Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food. ¹⁶ If one of you says to him, "Go, I wish you well; keep warm and well fed," but does nothing about his physical needs, what good is it? ¹⁷ In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.

¹⁰ **For we are God's workmanship,**

Workmanship means a work of art, a masterpiece. You are the apex of God's creation, a work of art, a masterpiece designed to do good works, not to gain salvation, but to show your love for Christ's work in you.

So, to experience salvation, to be in Christ, to be this masterpiece Paul captures in this verse.

2 Corinthians 5: 17 Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come.

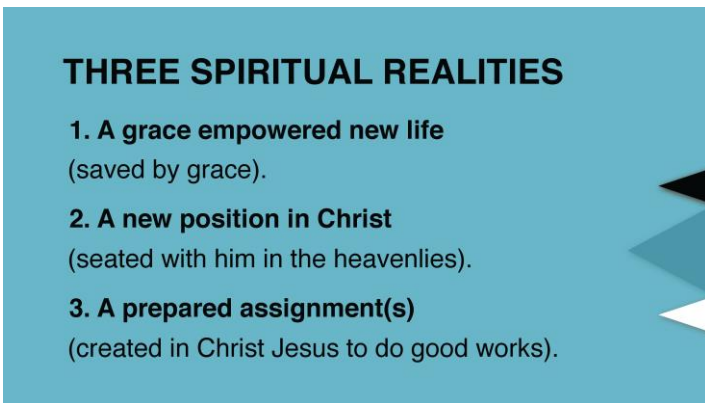
Remember our Big idea?

Big idea: Three spiritual realities in Christ give us victory over three spiritual enemies.



So, let's pull together these three spiritual realities that give us what we have for victory over the world, the flesh, and the devil.

Three Spiritual Realities



- 1. **A grace empowered new life (saved by grace).** We have a new power because we are in Christ, have been saved.
- 2. **A new position in Christ (seated with him in the heavenlies)** We have a new position that while we are in the fray, we are also above the fray.
- 3. **A prepared assignment (s) (created in Christ Jesus to do good works).** We are saved to serve.

I have a spiritual project for you this week. Say these 3 statements out loud to yourself every day a few times this next week. I have.... Repeat these to remind you of the incredible blessings you have in Christ.