

“For we shall see Him as He is.”

- A look at practical teaching

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Practical teaching addresses a very real concern: that of sin in the believer's life. It seeks to equip the faithful in Christ to have “victory” in his life over sin and to help him achieve practical holiness. But, there is great confusion today over what teaching is actually practical.

There are numerous books available on the topic of how to achieve “victory” in our lives. Sadly, many of these books add to the confusion by defining “victory” as things such as financial success and emotional well-being. These things, of course, are not a part of the biblical concept of practical “victory” which is simply to “*glorify God in your body and in your spirit*” (1 Cor 6:20). True practical teaching will certainly lead the faithful in Christ Jesus our Lord to have such victory.

This “victory,” which the masses of true believers are so desperately seeking, has apparently become elusive. The more books on the topic of “Christian victory” that hit the shelves, the more we seem to fall short of God's glory. It is sad to think that so many beloved ones of Christ are genuinely seeking the solution to this real problem and are not finding it, despite the abundance of teaching available which addresses the issue.

Often, the confusion is caused by the teaching itself. The problem identified by the teaching is correct: sin in the everyday life of believers. The desired result of the teaching is correct: practical holiness in the everyday lives of believers. It is the content of the teaching that misses the mark.

“*Are ye so foolish? having begun in the Spirit, are ye now made perfect by the flesh?*” (Gal 3:3). The Galatian church to whom this was stated had deteriorated to the point where some believed that certain *things* needed to be done in order for them to remain saved. Theological or doctrinal teaching today, among genuine believers, does not often go to this heretical extreme. Practical teaching, on the other hand, very often does.

The thinking present among the Galatians was, in effect, “God through Christ's work got it all started, now we must do our part to keep it secure.” The popular practical teaching of today might be summarized as, “Well, God has done it all. Our salvation is eternally secure. Now, here are some rules to follow and some step-by-step procedures to help you achieve holiness in your lives.” It is utterly unachievable for a man relying on his own strength to be “holy.” The procedure may work for a while, but inevitably, it will fail; it is a man's method. As the apostle Paul concludes of himself: “*...to will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find not*” (Rom 7:18); and “*O wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me from the body of this death?*” (Rom 7:24).

But, amidst the methods and rules so often “suggested,” one will often hear phrases such as, “With Christ it is more than possible for me to overcome sin in my life” (Rom 7:25) or “Only through Christ and His Spirit can a man live a life which glorifies God” (Rom 8). Amen! But these are more than mere words! Such statements are so often used without explanation. If indeed these statements are understood at all, then much of the teaching available does not reflect it.

How common is it for practical teaching to emphasize, “Husbands love your wives... Children obey your parents... Wives reverence your husbands...”? The fact is that normally, the saints already know exactly what they are to do. They know exactly what God expects of them, and they desperately desire to obey Him and please Him because they do love Him. The problem is that they physically can not do it: “*the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak*” (Mat 26:41). Simply talking about God's standard of holiness does not help one to achieve it: “*to will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find not*” (Rom 7:18).

It turns out that teaching which emphasizes what one should be doing and how one should be doing it does not work. In fact, because it does not work, it is not practical at all. But, there *is* such a thing as victory over the flesh. And there *is* such a thing as practical teaching which does help the believer to genuinely overcome sin in his life. True practical teaching comes in only one form: Jesus Christ our Lord *Himself*.

God's standard of holiness does not make one holy, but the Lord Jesus Christ does! Many teachers create, in effect, a form of law when they teach, “Don't do this. Don't do that. You must do this. You

must do that.” If God’s reason for giving the Law in the first place was to reveal man’s complete inability to keep it (Gal 3; Rom 7), then any teaching based on the principle of law is doomed to failure from the start. Men are very simply unable to meet God’s standard of holiness no matter how well they may understand it (Rom 3:20; Rom 7:5-7; Gal 2:21; 3:11-21; Heb 7:19). The Gospel was necessary because law could not make men holy. It still can’t. Yet, in Christianity, the idea of “law” is so often the chief method in “practical” teaching.

No doubt, teaching which mentions points of God’s holy standard should not be discouraged (Heb 10:24). But a proper perspective must be maintained in the overall content of that teaching. If the revelation of God’s holy standard to the children of Israel did not cause them to have “victory” over the flesh, neither will, nor can the mere knowledge of the commandments of Christ cause the believer to have “victory” over the flesh today. The question then is, what teaching does work?

“ Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is. And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure” (1 John 3:2-3).

There is a day coming when every believer in the promise of God through Christ will be just like the Lord Jesus. There will be no more struggles against sin. There will be no more temptations. Never again will the believer have a need to confess a failure to the God who loved him, for he will be just like the Lord Jesus, to whom twice the heavens opened up with the voice of God saying, “This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.” He will be just like the one who said, “Nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done;” just like the one who in obedience emptied Himself and suffered the death of the cross. Every believer will please the Father in all the things that he does even as Christ Jesus the Lord did and does.

Precious hope! No wonder the verse continues with, “... *every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure.*” What motivation this “hope” establishes in the believer *today* to be conformed to the image of His Son. No wonder so many are desperate to obey Him right now.

How then will this great thing be accomplished in the believer on that future day? Through eight easy steps? Perhaps on that future day there will be “righteous living” classes taught by angels who have studied God’s holiness for millennia? Nonsense! “*We shall be like Him for we shall see Him as He is.*” This concept is so wonderfully simple.

Yet, as absurd as it is to imagine taking holiness classes on that future day when the Lord will appear in all His glory, a moment of thought will reveal that such things *today* which are meant to make the believer more like Christ are equally absurd. So much “practical” teaching today depends on special programs or training to instruct on how to be “Christ-like.” So much “practical” teaching today depends on the words of commandment to remind the believer of God’s standard, and man’s methods to train him to meet those standards. But, in that day, God will accomplish perfect “victory” in every believer through the simple experience of observation: “*We shall see Him as He is.*”

Does it not stand to reason that exactly this approach must work also for today (2 Cor 3:18; Col 2:20-3:4)? In that day, the simple act of *seeing* the Lord Jesus will provide the means whereby God will bring about an unimaginable change. Does it not make sense that through seeing that same beloved one today through His Word, God will bring about the same sort of changes *now*?

Teaching which God uses to bring about consistent practical “victory” over sin will always center on the person of the Lord Jesus Christ: not His commandments, not the blessings which result from what He did, but the Lord Jesus Christ *Himself*. Obviously, this does not restrict true practical instruction to exposition of the four gospels. Aspects of Christ are revealed in every word of the Holy Scriptures through pictures and types, prophecy, doctrine, etc. (see Luke 24:27, John 5:39). It is the Lord Jesus Christ who is the central focus of every word on every page of the entire Bible. And it is the most practical teaching of all which will focus the believer’s attention on Him.

Practical teaching *does* indeed equip the believer to live a life that is pleasing to God. But effective practical teaching does not come in the form of detailed instruction in “*do’s and don’ts.*” Effective practical teaching does, however, come in the form of detailed instruction on the Lord Jesus Christ Himself: who He is; what He is; what He has done in obedience to the Father; etc.

Practical teaching will always highlight the Person of the Lord Jesus Christ. It will always point entirely and completely and solely to Him who has always done the will of God, and now sits on the right hand of the Majesty on High: the Son of God, our Lord Jesus Christ. This is true practical teaching, and it

will inevitably result in believers who *naturally* through their new nature (Col 3:9-10) do what the Lord Jesus wants them to do because the mind of Christ (1 Cor 2:16) within them is exercised through their observation of Him as He is.