

The World Conquered by the Faithful Christian

Richard Alleine

“For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world:
and this is the victory that overcometh the world,
even our faith.” —1 John 5:4



Soli Deo Gloria Publications
... for instruction in righteousness ...

The World Conquered by the Faithful Christian
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The World Conquered

Introduction

There is a twofold description given of the true Christian by the Apostle John, “Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ is born of God,” and again, “Whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world, even our faith,” 1 John 5:1,4.

A true Christian, then, is a conqueror, more heroic, more noble, more exalted than the greatest of all earthly conquerors, for he has conquered that which has conquered them—the world.

Now, what is the nature of this victory? This, dear friends, is a very important question. We reply that it is a spiritual victory which can only be obtained by faith. “This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith.”

The world is thus described by the Apostle: “For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world,” 1 John 2:16.

Faith is that living principle by which the people of Christ are united to Himself.

Faith is said to be our victory, for it brings us to Christ and so renders us victorious over the world which endeavors to keep us from Him; also, because it is the weapon of our warfare through which we obtain the victory. The world is the Christian’s enemy, with

which a combat is to be maintained and over which a conquest is to be won.

A true Christian has his enemies under his feet even while he is in the fight. He is a soldier as soon as he is a saint, and he is a conqueror as soon as he is a soldier. His very taking up arms ensures his victory.

The armor which the Christian is to use in his warfare is thus described: "Wherefore take unto you the whole armor of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breastplate of righteousness; and your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace; above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God: praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints," Ephesians 6:13-18.

Those who have so many battles to fight and who, on their way to heaven, must dispute every step have need of great courage. Be strong, therefore—strong for service, strong for suffering, strong for warfare. Let a soldier be ever so wellarmed without, if he does not have within a decided heart his armor will stand him in little stead.

"Be strong in the Lord"—in His cause, for His sake, and in His strength. We have no strength of our own. Our natural courage is as perfect cowardice and our natural strength as perfect weakness. All our sufficiency is of God. In His strength we must go forth and go on. By faith, we must obtain grace and help from

God to enable us to do that which, of ourselves, we cannot do.

The soldiers of Christ, His saints, must be well-armed. Put on the whole armor of God. Make use of all the proper weapons for repelling the temptations and stratagems of the devil. Get and exercise all the Christian graces, the whole armor, so that no part is left uncovered and exposed to the weapons of this deadly enemy.

It is called the armor of God because God both prepares and bestows it. Nothing will stand us in stead but this armor; and, as it is prepared for us, we must put it on. We must pray for grace. We must use the grace given us and draw it out into action and exercise as there is occasion.

This the Apostle enlarges upon, showing us what our danger is and what need we have to put on this whole armor, considering what sort of enemies we have to deal with—the devil and all the powers of darkness. “For we wrestle not against flesh and blood.” The combat for which we are to be prepared is not merely against our own corrupt natures, singly considered, but against the several works of devils who have a government and an influence which they exercise in this world, exciting the lusts and ministering to the pride and ambition of man. We have Satan against us, a subtle enemy who uses wiles and deceitfulness. He has many ways of beguiling unstable souls. Hence, he is called “a serpent” on account of his subtlety; an old serpent, experienced in the art of tempting.

The devil is a powerful enemy, having under him principalities, powers, and rulers, both numerous and vigorous, who rule undisturbed in those heathen na-

tions which are yet in darkness, exercising a cruel dominion over all men who are yet in a state of sin and ignorance.

These enemies annoy the saints and strive to tempt them to sin. They strive to deprive them of heavenly blessings, to obstruct all their communion with God. They labor to deface the heavenly image in their hearts. Thus, saints have need to be on their guard against the malice and subtlety of such foes. They have need of faith in their Christian warfare as well as of faith in their Christian work.

It is the Christian's duty to put on the whole armor of God.

Your duty, then, is to put on the whole armor of God and then to stand your ground against these enemies. You must not yield to the devil's allurements and assaults but decidedly oppose them. Satan is said to stand up against us. We must, therefore, stand up against him; set up and keep up an interest in opposition to his. Satan is the prince of this world, and his kingdom is the kingdom of sin. To stand against Satan is to strive against sin.

You should resolve, by the grace of God, not to yield to Satan. Resist him and he will flee from you; if you give way, he will get ground. If you distrust either your cause or your Leader, you give Satan advantage over you. Your calling is to withstand his assaults and to stand them out; and then, having done all that is incumbent on good soldiers of Jesus Christ, your warfare will be accomplished and you shall finally be victorious.

You should stand armed. The Apostle specifies the particulars of this armor, which is both offensive and defensive. Here is the military girdle or belt, the breastplate, the soldier's shoes, the shield, the helmet, and the sword. It is observable that, among them all, there is none for the back, as if to teach us the important lesson that if we turn our backs to the enemy we shall be exposed to danger and defeat.

Truth and sincerity is the girdle. It was prophesied of Christ that truth should be the girdle of His loins, and faithfulness the girdle of His reins. That which Christ was girt with, all Christians must be girt with. God desires truth, that is, sincerity, which indeed girds on all the other pieces of our armor. It is the Christian soldier's belt; ungirt with this, he is unblest.

Righteousness must be our breastplate. The breastplate shelters the heart. The righteousness of Christ, imputed to us, is our breastplate to defend us against the arrows of sin. The righteousness of Christ, implanted in us, is our breastplate to fortify our hearts against the attacks which Satan makes against us. The Apostle explains this as "Putting on the breastplate of faith and love," 1 Thessalonians 5:8, which includes all Christian graces.

Shoes of brass, or the like, were formerly part of the military armor. The use made of them was to defend the feet against the traps and sharp sticks which were wont to be laid privily in the way to obstruct the marching soldiers.

The preparation of the gospel of peace signifies a prepared and resolved frame of heart to adhere to the gospel and abide by it, which will enable Christians to walk in a steady pace in the way of religion, notwith-

standing the difficulties and dangers that may be in it. It is called the gospel of peace. It brings all sorts of peace—peace with God, with ourselves, and with one another.

Faith must be your shield “above all,” or chiefly “taking the shield of faith.” Faith is all in all to the Christian in the hour of temptation. The breastplate secures the heart, but with the shield the Christian warrior may turn every way. This is the victory over the world, even our faith. Consider faith as it is, the evidence of things not seen and the substance of things hoped for, and it will appear to be of admirable use for this purpose. Faith—receiving Christ and the benefits of redemption, and so deriving grace from Him—is like a shield and a universal means of defense.

Now the devil is called the wicked one. His temptations are called darts because of their swift and undiscerned flight and the deep wounds that they give to the soul; fiery darts, by way of allusion to the poisoned darts made use of in ancient warfare. Violent temptations, by which the soul is set in fire of hell, are the darts which Satan shoots at us. Faith is the shield by which we must quench those fiery darts, whereon we should receive them so that they may not hurt us.

Salvation must be your helmet, that is, your hope, 1 Thessalonians 5:8, which has salvation for its object. This hope is an assured expectation of victory and glory. The helmet secures the head. A good hope of salvation, wellfounded, will be the means of keeping the soul from being defiled by sin and of comforting the soul and keeping it from being troubled and tormented by Satan. Good hope keeps the Christian trusting in God and rejoicing in Him.

The Word of God is the sword of the Spirit. The Word of God is very necessary and of great use to the Christian in order to his maintaining and succeeding in the spiritual warfare. It is called the sword of the Spirit because it is of the Spirit's creation, and He renders His Word efficacious, powerful, and sharper than a two-edged sword. It is the duty of the Christian to make himself acquainted with the doctrines, precepts, promises, warnings, and threatenings of the Word of God that he may be ready and able to give a reason for the hope that is in him, that he may be able to answer the opposers of the truth, to reprove sinners, and to comfort saints. Scripture arguments are the most powerful to repel temptation. Christ Himself resisted Satan's temptation with "It is written." The Word of God, being hidden in the heart, will be the means of preserving from sin and of mortifying and killing those lusts and corruptions that are lying hidden therein.

Prayer must buckle on all the other parts of the Christian armor. You should add prayer to all these graces for your defense against your spiritual enemies. You should pray always, without ceasing. You should keep up constant times of prayer and be constant to them. You should always keep up a disposition to prayer and intermix ejaculatory prayers with other duties and common business. You should pray with all prayer and supplication, with all kinds of prayer—public, private, and secret—with all the parts of prayer—adoration of God, confession of sin, petition for mercy, intercession for others, and blessings and thanksgivings for favors received.

You should pray in the Spirit. Your hearts should be employed in the duty, and you should do it by the

grace of the Spirit of God. You should watch thereunto, endeavoring to keep your hearts in a praying frame and taking all occasions and improving all opportunities for the duty. You should watch all the motions of your hearts. You should persevere in prayer. You should persevere in particular requests. You should pray with supplication, not for yourselves only, but for all saints, "For we are members one of another."

Thus should you become true soldiers of Jesus Christ, answering to that double description given by the Apostle John as mentioned before, "Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ is born of God," and again, "Whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world, and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith."

How the enmity of the world acts against the souls of men.

The enmity of the world against the children of God reveals itself in this way—it pretends to be a friend, but its friendship is enmity. The friendship of the world is enmity with God, James 4:4, and, therefore, is enmity against saints. Its kindnesses are darts, swords, and arrows; its very peace is destruction to the soul. We will now endeavor to show wherein the enmity of the world acts against the souls of men.

The world withdraws their affections from God as their portion. And this is proved in the description given in the Word of God of the worldly, the wicked man, "the wicked will not seek after God: God is not in

all his thoughts,” Psalm 10:4. Men must either take God as their portion or the world as their portion.

The world takes advantage of men’s distempered minds and appetites; it sets itself up as their god, as their happiness or chief good. It proposes itself to them for a portion, and that as their rich portion. It tries to persuade men to satisfy themselves with what it offers as a happiness, and that it is unwise to seek an unknown happiness at the risk of losing a present enjoyment, which it will have to be the only happiness.

Our blessed Lord invites poor sinners with these gracious words: “Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you, and learn of Me; for I am meek and lowly in heart; and ye shall find rest unto your souls,” Matthew 11:28-29. “No, no,” says the world, “stay with me. Dwell here below. You see what your entertainment is here, you know not what you shall find elsewhere. Here you have substance. Here you have sunshine. Here you are full and abound. You have your houses full, your hands full, and your hearts full. You know what you have. You can taste the sweets of enjoyment here. The treasures of the other world, though they are called treasures of light, yet to you they are but treasures of darkness. You do not know what they are. Be content; set your affections on things here below, where you are well off.”

The enmity of the world acts also against men’s souls in withdrawing them from their allegiance to God as their Sovereign.

When the world has once drawn away the heart, it will easily pull away the shoulder. If the crown of God is despised, His yoke will be quickly shaken off. Men break faith with God when once they yield themselves

up to the world. If the world becomes their master, they yield themselves to it as servants. The strength of its temptations lies in the esteem they have for it and the affection they bear to it. Men will not bow before God when their hearts refuse to acknowledge Him, when they have chosen another god. What cannot the world lead them to if they have once made it their god! If it is their end, it will appoint them their means and way; any unrighteousness that will advance their worldly designs will be right in their eyes. Farewell faith, truth, mercy, honesty, and all consciousness of sin, further than they serve to make a gain of godliness.

The world, by withdrawing men from all love and obedience to God, exposes them to His wrath and displeasure. When they will have none of Him, He will have none of them. When they forsake Him, He sets Himself against them. God, in jealousy, says to those who profess to follow Him but who despise His name, "If then I be a Father, where is Mine honor? and if I be a Master, where is My fear?" Malachi 1:6. They who despise the riches of His goodness shall fall under His fury and fiery indignation. This is the state into which the world is leading men.

The enmity of the world acts against men by withholding them from Christ.

Christ came to bring sinners to God. As it is written, "For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit," 1 Peter 3:18.

Four ways the world holds men back.

The world holds men back from coming to Christ by these four means:

1. By darkening their sight.
2. By deadening their senses.
3. By engaging their hearts.
4. By furnishing them with excuses for their neglect of Christ.

1. The world holds men back from coming to Christ by darkening their sight. It hinders men from perceiving the excellency of Christ or their need of Him.

Now the world, by raising mists of darkness, blinds men's eyes and prevents them from seeing the light of the glorious gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. What is either beauty or blackness to the blind soul? We are naturally born blind; and, if our eyes begin a little to be opened, this world throws dust into our eyes that we may not see what is before us.

In the natural world, the sun dazzles men's eyes so that they cannot see the earth, but, in the spiritual world, the earth dazzles men's eyes so that they cannot see Christ, the Sun of Righteousness.

2. The world holds men back from coming to Christ by deadening their senses. Worldly men can neither see nor feel. They do not see the excellency and do not feel their need of Christ. They are infatuated by worldly vanities. They who live altogether by sense are without sense as to the value of any other than present things. They can contrive to live without Christ. The less they hear of Him, the better they are

pleased. They are opposed to Christ and His way, which is the way to poverty, not to wealth; to reproach and shame, not to honor. They can do well enough without Christ while they live, and what need they may have of Him after this life does not enter into their hearts. They are so busy with what they find here that they do not even look as far as the grave, much less beyond it.

It is hard to deal with such men except when they may be found alone, retired and withdrawn from the world. But how long may we wait ere we meet with such a season? Find them in a crowd among their worldly friends and companions, find them among their sheep or oxen, or find them at their pleasures, and the noise of these will so drown all that can be said that it will make no deeper an impression than a shower upon a stone. Cry an alarm in their ears, bring death and hell before them, and it does not move them even to ask such a question as: "What must we do to escape?" Men will never come to Christ till they see their need of Him; and they seldom see their need of Christ till, being withdrawn from the hurries of this world, they have leisure to reflect upon that which is to come.

Were men once deeply sensible how great their need of Christ is, how miserable, poor, blind, and naked they are without Christ, on what slippery places they stand, in what jeopardy they go daily, into what a dreadful gulf of woe and misery the wind and tide of their worldly prosperity are carrying them down, how suddenly they may be swallowed up in perdition and destruction, and what miserable comforts their past pleasures, and plenty, will then be to them; were they

sensible that nothing but Christ, and union with Him will save them from the gulf—that laying hold upon Him, the Rock of Ages, can alone secure them from perishing; were they sensible that it is Christ alone who can secure them from danger, their need might be argument enough to drive them to Him. When the prodigal had spent all that he had in his riotous living, when his whole stock was wasted and not a husk left, then he had time to consider, and think to himself in what a condition he stood, and feel the pinching feeling of the necessitous state to which his folly had reduced him. This brought him to his senses; again, he came to himself and then away he went to his father.

3. The world holds men back from coming to Christ by engaging their hearts. The world gets hold of their hearts, and there it will keep its hold as long as their hearts yield to it. It gets so much within them, and so twists and twines itself about their affections, that it is very hard to separate them from it.

Men cannot, therefore, close with Christ unless they break off from the world. In those hearts where Christ gets possession, He casts out the buyers and sellers, and their merchandise out of His temple. He changes the customs, pleasures, and business of the heart. Its dealings and its delights, its affections and its labors, must no longer be bestowed and consumed upon meat and drink, and humor, dissipation and folly. Our gracious Lord gives other infinitely more delightful enjoyments and happinesses to those souls who are united to Him. He comes unto them and makes His abode with them, John 14:23. They are the objects of His dearest regard; they are the sheep and lambs of His flock, and He leads them into rich pastures.

The necessary businesses of life should be minded in their place and season, but they must keep their place. Stand off farms and oxen, stand off lands and money, keep your distance. Christ will not come to be an underling; He will have the chief respect and esteem; He will have the command of all that is in the heart. Christianity consists in surrendering up the heart to Christ. The question is not whether we can find a corner in our hearts in which to entertain Christ, but who occupies the throne, who has the government of the soul?

All sinful pleasures, all sinful gains, must depart and come no more where Christ dwells; and those which are lawful must come down and be brought into subjection to Him. No more sensuality or worldly mirth, no more covetousness or oppression, no more pride or self-exalting, no more undue preference for the lawful concerns of this life, no more unhalloved anxiety about them, no more pleading business against religion, no more pleading safety against duty, no more pleading credit against conscience, no more pleading gain against godliness; away with these, cast them out, and never nourish these vipers again in your hearts. All that of the world which you have had, which you have ever loved, must become strange to you. Rather say with the prophet, "Although the fig tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines; the labor of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat; the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stalls: yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation," Habakkuk 3:17-18.

If men do begin to listen to the call of Christ, the

world steps in with its objections and asks, "What do you mean, simple souls? What are you doing? Where are you going? If you hearken to religion, to the Word of God, to your conscience, what will become of you? What will become of your property, of your honor, of your liberty? What will become of all the friendship and pleasure which you enjoy? Are you willing to be poor; are you willing to be in bondage; are you willing to be in reproach and disgrace? If you will have religion, and have anything to do with conscience, you are undone. Have you not given me your hearts; have you not cherished me, and cared for me as your own selves; and have not I deserved your care and respect? Have not I been the joy, and hope, and comfort of your lives? What will you be if I leave you, when your property leaves you, your pleasures leave you, your friends leave you?

"I know you love me. You love to be rich, to be great, to be at your ease; and you love your liberty as your lives. I know I have your hearts and you are unwilling to leave me. Therefore, consider and take heed, if you once hearken to religion and meddle with it, you will be dealing for another world, then farewell.

"But can you find it in your hearts to leave me? Has it not been well with you? Have you wanted anything? Have you not been filled with my good things? Have you not flourished and prospered? Have you not been full of meat and mirth, your bones full of rest, and your hearts full of ease and content? What have you lacked while you served me, and can you now find it in your hearts to part? Look to yourselves. On the day on which you resolve to follow religion, you must recollect and mark this, that I can become as bitter an enemy as

I have been a warm friend to you. I can persecute you and plague and vex you; and, if I may no longer walk in peace with you, I will be as thorns in your sides.”

Again, the world argues, “Be advised, foolish souls, let us not part thus. Stay, stay with me. Do not go after you know not what. Do not forsake an old friend for a new. Believe it, the old friend will prove the better friend. If you will be wise, remain as you are and mind your present gain. Lay by the thoughts of the other world; let hereafter take care for itself. I have not been so good to you but that I can be better to you than ever. Come, do eat, drink, and be merry; gather, keep, lay up what is before you and cast away all care about a future world.”

Thus, the world invites and flatters, beguiles and bewitches the soul into a neglect of Christ till it has smitten it to death and drowned it in perdition and destruction.

4. The world holds men back from coming to Christ by furnishing them with excuses for their neglect of Christ. Men are ashamed to be convicted of playing the fool, and they wish to have something to say for themselves to stop the voice of conscience and the mouths of men. It is written of those who were invited to the supper that they all, with one accord, began to make excuse. They were ashamed to say they would not come who had been too barefaced, but they excused themselves on account of their various occupations. Why, what is the matter that men will not come to Christ? What excuse have they? The world furnishes them with an excuse, just such a one as these men before-mentioned used: “I have bought a piece of ground, and I must needs go and see it. I pray thee

have me excused. And another said, I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I go to prove them. I pray thee have me excused. And another said, I have married a wife, and therefore I cannot come," Luke 14:18-20.

Dear friends, have your hearts never made this use of the world to excuse your neglect of Christ and your souls? It has, perhaps, hindered you many a time from coming to Christ, and then afforded you an excuse for not coming. How many prayers, how many Sabbaths, have you given up for it! Say, then, how much of these spiritual advantages has the world lost you? And when they are lost, when you have lost a praying time or hearing time, lost a Sabbath, a sermon, or a sacrament, has not this served as your excuse: "I was busy, and could not come"?

Our blessed Savior said to the Jews, "Ye will not come unto Me that ye might have life." Thus, in choosing death rather than life, you cannot say that you have reason on your side; therefore, no man can have reason to neglect Christ. No man can have reason to continue in sin; and, yet, there are few cases wherein men will not pretend to have reason for it, especially the worldling. He will be sure to find reason enough for his worldliness.

Though the drunkard will hardly say, "I have reason to be drunk"; though the covetous will hardly say, "I have reason to be an idolater"; though the swearer will hardly say, "I have reason to swear"; though the blasphemer will hardly say, "I have reason to blaspheme God," yet the worldling will readily say, "I have reason to get an estate, to keep what I have, to please my appetites, to enjoy the good things of this life, to look to self, and to enjoy what is my own."

Here, then, is the language of the worldling: "I pray you, have me excused." For what? That you do not come to Christ and hearken to and follow Him? That is, excuse me for undoing myself, for casting off all hopes of everlasting salvation, for going swiftly to hell.

Oh, what fools are the wise men of this world! They destroy their souls to please and provide for their bodies. They count the world their happiness; and this, their happiness, will ruin them. Some men's learning ruins them; some men's business has the killing of their souls; some men's money does it; some men's pleasures do it; some men's friends have the killing of their souls. Some are too rich, some are too busy, some are too merry, some are too high, some are too civil and courtly to come to Christ for salvation. Behold the wisdom of this world!

Inordinate, excessive care about the things of the world is vain and fruitless. Men weary themselves for vanity. Thus it is written, "Ye have sown much, and bring in little; ye eat, but ye have not enough; ye drink, but ye are not filled with drink; ye clothe you, but there is none warm; and he that earneth wages earneth wages to put it into a bag with holes," Haggai 1:6. And again, "Ye looked for much, and, lo! it came to little; and when ye brought it home, I did blow upon it. Why? saith the Lord of hosts. Because of Mine house that is waste, and ye run every man unto his own house," Haggai 1:9. The prayer of the saint was, "Turn away mine eyes from beholding vanity," and what else is there on earth to behold? What is there on earth which, when possessed, does not disappoint the expectation conceived of it? Solomon took an inventory of the world and of all its best things. He cast up the ac-