

Successful Christianity Now

- I. This study sets forth the importance of not letting the past impede victory and progress in the present.
- A. We do not live in the past and cannot change the past.
 - B. Decision-making is for the present and has implications for the future, not the past.
 - C. We do well to live in the present under the present law of Christ in this present evil world. **GAL 1:4.**
 - 1. The past law of Moses served its purpose but could perfect nothing. **HEB 7:19; 9:9.**
 - 2. The entire law of the sinless future world is not the rule for us now. **LUK 20:34-36.**
 - a. They of that world will not have to war against sin but we must be constantly at war with it now. **REV 21:27; 1PE 5:8-9.**
 - b. They of that world will never witness a brother being cast out but we must expect it now. **JOH 6:37 ct/w MAT 18:7; 2TI 3:1-5.**
 - D. The past is valuable for such things as:
 - 1. example and admonition. **1CO 10:6-11.**
 - 2. learning and hope. **ROM 15:4.**
 - 3. humility. **1TI 1:12-14.**
 - E. But the past can otherwise be contrary to our success as believers.
 - 1. We are to lay aside *every weight* that hinders our race. **HEB 12:1.**
 - 2. The past can be such a weight if it is not processed by faith.
 - F. The gospel is for the casting down of imaginations. **2CO 10:5.**
 - 1. imagination: The action of imagining, or forming a mental concept of what is not actually present to the senses (cf. sense 3); the result of this process, a mental image or idea (often with implication that the conception does not correspond to the reality of things, hence freq. *vain (false, etc.) imagination*).
 - 2. It is our challenge to distinguish between the realities and our perceptions in the past, to distinguish between past right and wrong, to not pretend that the real past never happened, and to process the past through the grid of faith in the present.
 - a. Paul had a warped perception of God, Christ and righteousness in his pre-conversion past. **ACT 26:9.**
 - b. Paul also had zeal and a good conscience in his pre-conversion past (**ACT 22:3; 23:1**) which he continued in after conversion.
 - c. Upon conversion, Paul abandoned past errors but not past correctness, and he processed the past through faith so as to live victoriously in the present. **1CO 15:9-10; GAL 2:20-21.**
 - 3. The battle lines are drawn between God's truth and Satan's lies which corrupt our thinking and masquerade as reality.
- II. We all have pasts that can weigh us down and hinder progress in Christ.
- A. Past sins must be identified, renounced and repented of in biblical conversion. **MAT 3:6; PRO 28:13; JOB 34:31-32; ACT 3:19.**
 - 1. This gives one a clean slate upon which a better life in service to Christ may be written. **1CO 6:9-11.**
 - 2. Sins become identified with one's past, not his present or future. **1PE 1:13-14; 4:1-3.**
 - 3. Continuing sin after mercy invites judgment (**JOH 5:14**), grieves the Spirit

- (**EPH 4:30; HEB 10:29**) and, if reverted to, calls one's election into question. **2PE 2:20-22.**
4. Successful processing of past sins depends on knowing what sin is, and this depends upon God's law. **1JO 3:4; ROM 4:15; PSA 119:128.**
 - a. God's word is light that exposes known and unknown darkness. **PSA 19:7-13.**
 - b. God's word is also light that relieves false burdens. **ROM 10:1-3; ACT 15:28; LUK 4:18.**
 - c. Remember Paul: it is the wrong that needs to be forsaken, not the right.
 5. Successful present Christian living after conversion sees past sin as *remitted* (**ACT 2:38**), *washed away* (**ACT 22:16**) and *dominionless*. **ROM 6:1-2, 11-18.**
 - a. We know we are the objects of mercy (*Forbearance and compassion shown by one person to another who is in his power and who has no claim to receive kindness; kind and compassionate treatment in a case where severity is merited or expected*) and therefore have nothing to boast of before God. **ROM 3:27.**
 - b. Knowing we deserve no mercy makes us humble, and this allows for more grace to live victoriously now. **JAM 4:5-6.**
 - c. Having obtained such mercy, we are better fitted to understand and offer hope to others. **1TI 1:15-16.**
- B. We cannot change the reality of past sin by present thought but we can by present thought have a healthy perception of the past. This is accomplished by thinking about ourselves and our past sins as God does. Faithfully embracing His declarations about us as repented believers is key to present success.
1. We should embrace what Scripture says Christ has done for sinners.
 - a. He by Himself purged our sins. **HEB 1:3.**
 - b. He has forgiven us all trespasses. **COL 3:12.**
 - c. He has called us unto eternal glory. **2TI 1:9; 1PE 5:10.**
 - d. He has positioned us in Himself in glory. **EPH 2:6.**
 - e. He has made us new creatures. **2CO 5:17; EPH 2:10.**
 2. We should embrace what God declares about believers who also sin (for there is no other kind on earth).
 - a. They are children of God in spite of themselves. **1JO 5:1; 3:2; ROM 7:21-25.**
 - b. They are justified. **ACT 13:39.**
 - c. They have everlasting life. **JOH 6:47; 11:25-26.**
 - d. They shall not come into condemnation. **JOH 5:24.**
 - e. They are washed, sanctified and given a clean start. **1CO 6:11.**
 - f. They are empowered, not enslaved. **ROM 6:22; 1JO 5:4.**
 - g. They are represented in heaven by an Advocate, not an accuser. **1JO 2:1 c/w ROM 8:33-34.**
 - h. They have a right to personally ask God for mercy and are assured of its provision. **HEB 4:15-16; 1JO 1:9.**
 - i. They have a forgetful, blotting God. **ISA 43:25.**
- C. Our present success as Christians largely depends on how we see ourselves, i.e., what we identify as.
1. Do we see ourselves as we once were under Adamic sin in our nature because we sometimes sin? **EPH 2:1-3.**
 2. Do we see ourselves as somehow still responsible to obtain eternal favor with

- God by our doings, as if the great work of justification was not finished once and for all, thus holding our conscience in thrall? **ROM 10:1-4; HEB 10:1-4.**
3. Do we see ourselves as yet guilty of forgiven sins or still under the dominion of the law of sin and so conclude that our failings define us and prove our hypocrisy, hopelessness and damnation? **ROM 7:23-25.**
 4. As long as we entertain false perceptions of who we are NOW in Christ, we will be frustrated in our Christian progress by bondage to unnecessary burdens. The truth is needed to make us free. **JOH 8:31-32.**
 5. Learn a lesson from the elephant. A young elephant can be trained by restraints and beatings to go through its life as a numbed behemoth. It has all the power it needs to break free of its master but its conditioned mind holds it in bondage. It does not have a realistic perception of itself. It sees itself as chained when it may not have had a chain upon it for years.
- D. Satan, like the elephant trainer, cons our minds by his lies into a false state of bondage. We need to renounce his lies in favor of the truth or we will not walk as free men with good consciences. The more false burdens we bear, the more our progress is impeded.
1. Fact: The difference between our past Adamic nature of death in sin and who we are now is not owing to ourselves, but rather to God and His grace. **EPH 2:4-5.**
 2. Fact: Saints will sin but they have an Advocate to plead their cause. **1JO 2:1-2.**
 3. Fact: Confessed sins are forgiven (**1JO 1:9**). That sin occurred is one thing; that it, being confessed, still has guilt attached to it is another.
 4. Fact: Past sins that are confessed and forgiven are no barrier to renewed value, joy in God and usefulness to God. **PSA 51:7-15; PRO 24:16.**
- E. Satan loves to accuse our consciences whenever we slip up, implying that we are not even God's child and should just concede.
1. When we feel like worthless nobodies who are nothing more than walking hypocrites with delusions of hope, powerless to meet the challenges of daily Christian living, we are likely to think like the poor elephant.
 2. There is a big difference between "having sin" and "being sin," between "depraved" and "dysfunctional."
 3. In Christ, we are no longer totally depraved sinners; we have been redeemed by the blood of our Savior and are saints who sometimes sin. **ROM 7:21.**
 4. Satan may disrupt our daily victory, but not our position and identity in Christ. But if he can dupe us into believing that we are NOT in Christ, we will live as though not in Him.
 5. Paul's prayer was that believers would perceive their position in Christ of being exalted over Satan (**EPH 1:19-21; 2:4-6**). If we do not realize our position and power over Satan, we will not utilize it. The elephant will not even try to go past the limits of his chain that had long ago been removed.
 6. Mark the TRUTH about our PRESENT identity in Christ:
 - a. Our old man died with Christ. **ROM 6:6; GAL 2:20.**
 - b. We are new creatures in Him. **2CO 5:17.**
 - c. We have NO condemnation. **ROM 8:1-2, 33-34.**
 - d. We are secure in His love. **ROM 8:38-39.**
 - e. We are seated positionally with Christ in heaven. **EPH 2:6.**
 - f. We are NO MORE under sin's dominion. **ROM 6:8-11, 14.**
 - g. We are FREE from the law of sin and death. **ROM 7:4; 8:2.**
 - h. We have His Spirit for victory. **1JO 4:4.**
 - i. No temptation or oppression is greater than His grace.

1CO 10:13; 2CO 12:9-10.

- j. The former barrier between us and God being taken out of the way, we need not shy from approaching Him for grace to overcome.
HEB 10:18-22; 4:16.

III. Long-held habits, traditions and thoughts must be examined in the light of biblical truth (**1TH 5:21; PSA 119:128**) and abandoned to whatever degree necessary to bring one into conformity to Christ. **2CO 10:5.**

- A. Millennia of superstitious idolatry with its customs and lusts which God suffered among the Gentiles was no basis for continuing in them when the light of the gospel came. **ACT 14:15-16; 17:30.**
1. The gospel called such to repent/return to original recognition of the invisible God the nations had abandoned in favor of gods of their own choosing which satisfied their hunger for lust and power. **ROM 1:20-25 c/w COL 1:14-15.**
 2. It has been the reluctance to fully abandon pagan religion that has been a basis of the corruption of pure Biblical religion. **JER 10:2-4; GAL 4:8-10.**
- B. That the Jews had traditions contrary to Scripture to which they had long held was not a legitimate basis to cleave to them. **1PE 1:18-19.**
- C. That Paul once genuinely thought it proper to persecute Christians was not a legitimate basis for continuing that. **ACT 26:9.**
- D. Just because something is new to us does not of itself mean it is wrong. **ACT 17:18-19.**
- E. We are traditionalists by nature so much so that when something comes along that is better for us, we tend to reject it. **LUK 5:39.**
1. This mentality is a past weight that must be laid aside, per **HEB 12:1.**
 2. The gospel challenges our “comfort zones” of familiar belief and conduct so as to lighten our load for the race set before us. What we do with those challenges determines whether we run, limp, fall or grow weary (contrary to **GAL 6:9**).
 3. The lack of perfect knowledge today or reluctance to abandon past errant thought are not reasons to resist God’s refining process. **PRO 4:18.**
- F. Various excuses to resist abandoning long-held beliefs or practices in favor of the forward compulsion of gospel truth meet with God’s disapproval.
1. “I will not change.” That’s stubbornness. **1SAM 15:23; JAM 4:17.**
 2. “I will change next year.” That’s vain assumption. **PRO 27:1; 29:1.**
 3. “Others will think ill of me.” That’s pride and fear of man. **PRO 16:18; 29:25.**
 4. “I am too weak.” That’s a denial of God’s power within. **1JO 4:4.**
 5. “I am too old to change.” Be wise in thy latter end. **PRO 19:20.**
- G. We need to be honest with ourselves about clinging to sinful or unprofitable habits.
1. Sinful habits should have been buried with the old man upon conversion (**ROM 6:4**). These kind of old habits may die hard but they should die. How do you expect the “new man” to run effectively when you have exhumed rotten parts of the old man to weigh you down and caused God to throw a flag on the play?
 2. We may have done something for so long that it has become “second nature” to us. **JER 13:23; 9:5.**
 - a. accustomed: Made customary, practised habitually; wonted, used; customary, habitual, usual.
 - b. The Cretians had a long-standing stereotypical characteristic of lying, noted by heathen poets and the Holy Spirit (**TIT 1:12-13**) and such default habits cause others to profile, generalize and guard accordingly.

- c. Bible Christians should be profiled as sin-loathing, duty-oriented, liberty-minded, mercy-exalting, hope-driven lights in this world (**PHIL 2:14-15**) so much so that enemies must resort to shameful false accusations.
1PE 3:15-16.
- 3. We may have a long history of unprofitable action or reaction that would be an impediment to personal growth or to healthy relationships with others.
 - a. If we have been struggling to develop personally while continuing in the same unprofitable antics to which we have accustomed ourselves (and may have rationalized as “harmless” or even “good”), is this not a form of insanity (doing the same thing over and over and expecting different results)?
 - b. If present habits would not be beneficial to a future relationship, the time to cull those habits is now, not after a relationship develops. Do not think that bad habits will magically stop when Mr. or Mrs. Right comes along, or that Mr. or Mrs. Right will long endure or be benefitted by your bad habits.

IV. A critical component of biblically processing the past is the issue of needed religious change, specifically, how one is to relate to God in worship and service according to the truth.

- A. This applies to errant religion exposed as such by the truth. Hence, the Gentiles had to abandon their idols and customs. **1CO 10:7, 19-22.**
 - 1. But recall that Paul was a dedicated Pharisee of Israel (to whom God’s service was given, **ROM 9:4**), whose misguided zeal was done with a clear conscience. **ACT 22:3; 23:1.**
 - 2. He was no Gentile idolater, nor an adulterer, nor a fornicator, etc. but was, as touching the righteousness of the law, *blameless* (he had never been judicially censured for breaches of the law). And he had the best of Jewish credentials. **PHIL 3:4-6.**
 - 3. But the truth of Christ turned all that to dung for Paul (**PHIL 3:7-9**) and this is how one who is converted should view their former religious error, even a monotheistic one, and especially one that assumes justification by sinners’ works.
 - a. “Do and live” righteousness (**ROM 10:5**) never justified anyone; it only condemned men. **GAL 3:10.**
 - b. “It’s all up to you” is a hindering past weight that must be laid aside, per **HEB 12:1.**
 - c. Paul describes the Law as dead so to free us to serve Christ in “...newness of spirit, and not in the oldness of the letter” (**ROM 7:6**). One cannot run well with a dead man on his back. c/w **GAL 5:7.**
- B. This applies to outmoded forms of service and duty which God has abandoned.
 - 1. *Striking* the rock for water was upgraded to *speaking to* the rock, and holding to the outmoded form brought judgment even though it got results. **EXO 17:6 c/w NUM 20:7-12.**
 - 2. Patriarchal individual sacrifices were upgraded to Levitical tabernacle sacrifices under Moses’ Law. **DEU 12:8-14.**
 - 3. Moses’ system was set aside by Jesus Christ’s new covenant which reformed the manner of service to God. **HEB 8:13 - 9:10.**
 - a. Circumcision, holydays, sabbath days, dietary law, incense, musical instruments for public worship, etc., were part of the “...weak and beggarly elements...” (**GAL 4:9-10**) that were abolished by the N.T.

- b. The Book of Hebrews is largely an appeal to Jewish Christians to transition fully away from Moses and Levitical service to Christ under the N.T. in His church: it was time to move on. **HEB 13:9-13.**
 - c. One of the great hindrances to the Christian's forward momentum is the burden of O.T. forms of service and the various permissions of the O.T. for things like polygamy and easy divorce.
- 4. Neither the patriarchal or Mosaic institutions of service apply to N.T. Christians. They were for the past and should stay in the past.
 - a. The N.T. order was established by Christ's apostles whom the Spirit guided into all truth. **JOH 16:13; 1JO 4:6.**
 - b. Whereas the apostles suffered Jewish Christians' limited observance of O.T. institutions to wean them from Moses to Christ, they forbade binding Gentile believers with O.T. institutions that not even Jews could bear. **ACT 15:10, 24-29.**

- V. We must also not yield to the notion that we have come far enough in our Christian experience: "We rest on our laurels."
 - A. Spiritually compromised Lot stopped at pathetic Littleville when he should have gone on to angelic MountainView. **GEN 19:17-22.**
 - B. Israel stopped short of God's rest in Canaan when they should have entered. **HEB 3:14-19.**
 - C. Paul would not even let his Christian accomplishments hinder his forward momentum. **PHIL 3:12-15.**
 - D. We are warned against resting on first principles when there is more to be learned and assimilated. **HEB 5:12 – 6:3.**
 - E. God's word to His people has ever been, "...go forward" (**EXO 14:15**).
 - F. One may be in the way of truth yet still need converting. **LUK 22:32.**
 - G. Past obedience will not excuse present disobedience. **EZE 18:24 c/w JAM 4:17.**

- VI. We are also warned against inappropriate preoccupation with "the good old days." **ECC 7:10.**
 - A. This is not an outright censure of all consideration of former good days. **PSA 137:1-2; MAL 3:4; HEB 10:32-34.**
 - B. It would censure charging God with injustice or abandonment when the real issue is that you're being exercised with a present chastening by a present, loving Father. **JDG 6:13-14; JOB 29:2-5; HEB 12:5-6; 13:5.**
 - C. It would censure a murmuring spirit that is perturbed more by the bad present times than the bad present lust-oriented heart that overlooks present mercies: "It is folly to complain of the badness of our own times when we have more reason to complain of the badness of our own hearts (if men's hearts were better, the times would mend) and when we have more reason to be thankful that they are not worse, but that even in the worst of times we enjoy many mercies, which help to make them not only tolerable, but comfortable." (Matthew Henry on Ecclesiastes 7:10) See **PHIL 2:14; JUDE 1:16.**
 - D. It would censure fond remembrance of the days of bondage to men, false worship or sin because then the flesh was satiated. **NUM 11:4-5; JER 44:17-19.**
 - 1. Israel got out of Egypt but Egypt went with them in their hearts. **ACT 7:39.**
 - 2. We are warned, "...Remember Lot's wife..." (**LUK 17:31-33**). She placed too much stock in the "life" she had in a prosperous, sexually promiscuous, "pro-gay" culture. **GEN 13:10; JUDE 1:7.**
 - E. It would censure the equating of former protections and deliverances of an obedient,

humble or penitent people with a present proud and disobedient people.
ISA 48:1-2 c/w MIC 3:11.

- VII. What about past suffering of personal injustice, gross violation, trauma?
- A. I do not have a pat answer that perfectly comprehends every such situation.
1. Emotional / psychological trauma is a reality that may come from one, a series, or a combination of events. PTSD, nervous breakdowns, anxiety disorders, etc., are real but not without hope and relief.
 2. Trauma and gross violations are so diverse and the victims of such different strengths or weaknesses that specific counsel which would be appropriate for one may not be so for another.
 3. There may well be a need for a trained professional to be involved.
 - a. Paul underwent many injustices and traumas. **2CO 11:23-33.**
 - b. Beside the promises and the occasional personal presence of Christ (**ACT 23:11; 27:23; 2TI 4:17**), God also provided Paul a beloved physician who was his constant companion. **COL 4:14; 2TI 4:11.**
 - c. Jesus recognized the physician's usefulness. **LUK 5:31.**
 - d. Paul's traumas were also made bearable to him because of deliverances out of them and because of the future glory: he never quit pressing toward the mark. **2CO 1:9-10; 2TI 3:11; 4:7-8.**
- B. Of past personal injustices which one has suffered:
1. Was it a mountain or a molehill?
 - a. Beware of the tendency to puff up a personal injustice far beyond its actual damage and then use that as an excuse to not get over it and move on with God's help. Jesus taught us the wisdom of not coming unglued over minor offenses. **MAT 5:38-42 c/w 1CO 6:7.**
 - b. Was it as big a mountain of injustice as our Lord suffered? He "...threatened not; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously" (**1PE 2:23**). Turning the matter and yourself over to the Supreme Justice for remedy helps.
 2. Was it suffering for righteousness' sake or folly or just one of those uncomfortable lessons of life in an imperfect world? **1PE 2:19-21.**
 3. Remember Joseph. He was terribly mistreated by family and fellows but committed his lot to God, lived righteously, and patiently waited for God to lift him up. **GEN 45:5-8.**
- C. Do not weaponize past trouble by using it to fight needed reform or progress in your life: "I had a bad childhood / I have been mistreated / I have experienced trauma, so I am justified in my resistance to needed reform or to moving on to perfection."
1. This is a form of blameshifting to God, like Adam. **GEN 3:12.**
 2. God Who allowed trouble in your past also ordained trouble for His only begotten Son Who shed His blood for you that you might have abundant life through Him (**JOH 10:10**). God trumps your victim card with His grace card.
- D. Do not underestimate the power of forgiveness. **LUK 23:34.**
1. forgive: *trans.* To give, grant. *Obs.* 2. To give up, cease to harbour (resentment, wrath). Also, to give up one's resolve (to do something).
 2. Perpetually retaining anger or bitterness towards a past offender is not entirely unlike drinking poison and expecting the offender to die.
 3. Though theologically flawed, the sequel of the movie, "Unbroken" has a godly message about the transformative power of forgiveness.