It's That Simple Jim Ayer

The Synagogue leaders threw her at the feet of the Son of God. After all, she was a vile sinner and justice demanded that a sentence of stoning be carried out. Reading their every hidden thought, Jesus bent down and, with His finger, etched their sins in the dust of the large paving stones.

With a sense of condemnation, in shame and with heads bowed low, one-by-one these church leaders crept away. Jesus drew near to the woman and said, "Where are those, thine accusers? Hath no man condemned thee?" She said, "No man, Lord." They both knew she was guilty, but Jesus responded with some of the most beautiful words found in all of Scripture: "Neither do I condemn thee" John 8:11.

This is a stirring biblical account of forgiveness with powerful ramifications that reach down to our day and extend throughout all eternity. GRACE! Without the spoken words of love, "*Neither do I condemn thee*," John 8:11, you and I would be without hope—lost for eternity.

But wait—as the radio personality Paul Harvey used to say, "Now you're going to hear the rest of the story." Do you remember the next words spoken by Jesus to this prostitute? You should, because they are vital to the life and growth of every one who takes the name "Christian" as his or her own. His words were, "Go and sin no more." John 8:11

"In His act of pardoning this woman and encouraging her to live a better life, the character of Jesus shines forth in the beauty of perfect righteousness. While He does not palliate sin, nor lessen the sense of guilt, He seeks not to condemn, but to save." The Desire of Ages, page 462.

The exercising of her faith by accepting His words of forgiveness—removing the condemnation of sin— must also accept the remainder of His words as containing the power to set her free from further pain and guilt. In other words, the continuation of sinning.

Many Christians seem to ignore the power-packed words, "Go and sin no more" ... or at best, we've have marginalized them. We emphasize Christ's physical rescue and spiritual washing away of her sins. But we do this at the expense of her complete spiritual rescue. We deny the very words, or promise, that contained her full spiritual healing. God not only wants to wash us clean on the outside but on the inside as well.

Of course, this could be just an isolated incident. Perhaps Jesus really didn't intend to be so direct regarding gaining victory over sin. After all, everyone knows that we can't stop sinning until we make it to heaven ... right?

In John 5:4, Jesus approached a man lying on his mat and asked an amazing question, "Wilt thou be made whole?" Hope sprang up in the man as Jesus then spoke these simple words, "Take up thy bed and walk." Instantly his muscles sprang into action. He jumped up rejoicing in the power of the Lord and ran to the temple to praise God.

"By sin we have been severed from the life of God. Our souls are palsied. Of ourselves we are no more capable of living a holy life than was the impotent man capable of walking. There are many who realize their helplessness, and who long for that spiritual life which will bring them

into harmony with God; they are vainly striving to obtain it. In despair they cry, 'O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from this body of death?' (Romans 7:24, margin). Let these desponding, struggling ones look up. The Savior is bending over the purchase of His blood, saying with inexpressible tenderness and pity, 'Wilt thou be made whole?' He bids you arise in health and peace" The Desire of Ages, page 203.

This is another beautiful story of the love, forgiveness, and the healing power of God. But again, we must consider the rest of the story. Sometime later, Jesus found this man worshiping in the temple—he had come to bring a thank offering to God. The only recorded words of Jesus to this man were the following, "Behold, thou art made whole: sin no more, lest a worse thing come unto thee" John 5:14. (emphasis provided)

Jesus says, "Go and sin no more," the devil says, "God is not serious!" When God shares, "All my biddings are enablings" COL 333.1, many join the devil in saying, "His biddings are impossible!" But who knows better regarding what is possible and impossible? Is God, the Creator of all things, a cosmic prankster? Does He tease us with the impossible? Obviously not.

When God speaks, His Word accomplishes ALL He desires, "So shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it." Isaiah 55:11.

Are you starting to get the picture? Without question, the Lord was seeking to point the harlot and the paralytic toward a new, and wonderful life that He considered worthy and possible, a path of victory over sin—not victory in a life immersed in continual sin. What do you think was the response of the woman and the man? I believe they said, "Yes Lord," because the One who saved them from their doom had also provided all of the strength (His strength and victorfy) that would enable them to walk in the new pathway.

Much of Christendom has moved into perilous territory over this issue. The focus has shifted from how men and women ought to be—to how men and women are. We have forgotten that "Go and sin no more," was recorded directly from the lips of Jesus; the same lips that called all Creation into existence from absolutely nothing.

Jesus didn't say to the harlot or the paralytic, "Don't worry; I realize you can't change who you are, so keep on trying to do better, and remember, I love you. I've paid for your sins, so it's alright!" Rather, He said, "I love you and have rescued you and I simply cannot let you suffer under the oppressive thumb of the devil any longer. You are too precious to me to allow the devil to torment and bury you in sin."

The devil is still trying to trick us into believing his 6,000-year-old lie—that no one is capable of following God. But the fact is, Jesus had a strategy for them and has one for us today. What is it? It is the liberation from sin that took root in Eden. At the very onset of sin, there was a Savior.

Do you remember the story found in the book of Genesis chapter 3? Immediately after the fall of Adam and Eve, Jesus was present offering the only remedy to their catastrophic situation. It was a two-part plan: He provided the pair a covering of skin that completely shielded their nakedness. Their own fig-leaf-righteousness offered them no help whatsoever. The covering of skins foreshadowed the eternal sacrifice by the Lamb of God to cover our nakedness—grace, love, and forgiveness, all wrapped into one. Hallelujah! Praise God for His amazing grace!

He then looked at the devil and delivered these words, "And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel." Genesis 3:15 (underlining provided). This was the other half of His marvelous plan of salvation. Jesus did not want Adam and Eve clean on the outside only. No, He wanted to provide them power to resist further temptations of the devil—to have them on the inside as well.

Did you notice the word enmity? It's an amazing word because it contains all of the power of the Godhead. It comes from the root Hebrew word which means to hate or be an enemy to. It offers the deep implication of being of another tribe.

Consider this, Adam and Eve just surrendered their allegiance to the devil via their act of open rebellion. They had surrendered to a new master, Satan. What was going on here? What was Jesus offering? He wrapped them in skin—grace now clothes them on the outside but sin still reigns on the inside. Jesus now offers them a way out—to become aligned with another tribe, God's tribe, if you will.

This new alignment would come via an invited guest dwelling within them—the third person of the Godhead, the Holy Spirit! They had thrown away their position of royalty. They were no longer in charge of planet earth—the devil was! Their only hope was to invite the Holy Spirit to abide within them. Hence forth, He would provide the needed hatred of, and power to resist sin.

Understand, the very character and nature of God repels sin. King David said it best, "For You are not a God that enjoys wickedness; nor shall evil dwell with You. The foolish shall not stand in Your sight. You hate all doers of iniquity." Psalm 5:4-5. Here is our key to victory. We invite the Holy Spirit to abide—take up residence—in us and He repels sin... not us. His presence rejects each attack of sin sent to tempt us.

Having taken up residence in us, it is the Holy Spirit that answers the door each time the devil comes knocking. As our journey continues, we fall more deeply in love with our Best Friend. We learn to answer the door less and less and allow God to answer the door more and more.

Jesus bids all to, "Go and sin no more." Indeed, He pointed Adam and Eve to the path of victory, and later walking in Israel, He invited all to "Come follow me." Remember that Jesus reached out to offer His helping hand—the hand of strength and Almighty power—to both the harlot and the paralytic. It is this same hand, reaching out in love, that is ready to lift us, not only up, but out of our pit of sin and shame.

In the opening chapter of Revelation, a three-fold blessing is pronounced, "Blessed is the one who reads and hears the Words of this prophecy, and the ones keeping the things written in it, for the time is near." Revelation 1:3. Just imagine, blessings for reading, hearing, and keeping those things that are given to us by Jesus—the First and Last, the Alpha and Omega. With our minds wrapped around these blessings let's proceed to the next chapters.

In Chapters two and three of Revelation, Jesus sets forth the individuals who will share eternity with Him, those who "Overcome." He doesn't say those who have their names on the church books or those who are tithe payers, no. Jesus is looking for "Overcomers." But overcomers of what? Overcomers of Satan, Sin, and temptation.

As if the reward of overcoming is not enough, there are additional rewards promised to this special people. Let's look at just one of them found in Revelation 3:21, "To him who overcomes I will grant to sit with Me in My throne, even as I also overcame and have sat down with My Father in His throne."

How can He allow us to sit with Him in His throne—co-regents with Him—ruling the universe in our fallen, sinful condition? The simple answer is, He cannot allow it! That's why He is looking for "Overcomers." We must be Transformed! Only royalty can sit on the throne.

But we moan and groan as our spiritual failures continue to drag us downward toward perdition. Like the Apostle Paul we cry, "But now it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwells in me. For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) dwells no good thing. For to will is present with me, but how to perform that which is good I do not find. For I do not do the good that I desire; but the evil which I do not will, that I do." Romans 7:17-19.

Many people use these words to condemn every thought or suggestion of spiritual advancement because, they say, we must take into account our weakened situation, our inability to overcome temptation. It is presented as fact that the devil and his temptations are far too strong for us! See, they say, even the great Apostle Paul in Romans 7 tells us he could not overcome the flesh. I will be the first to admit that Paul could not overcome self, neither can you, nor I, change ourselves.

Oscar Wilde once quipped, "I can resist anything except temptation." I've been there. I have cried myself to sleep at night over committing the same sins again and again. I have been so hung up on the same sins, I couldn't even get on to any new ones. I was a serial sinner. Just like Paul I cried out, "O wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" Romans 7:24. I was caught in a never-ending downward spiral—all the time calling myself a Christian. But this situation does not need to be so!

Follow me now on a line of reasoning that will open up exciting discoveries the devil must keep hidden. Paul was a Hebrew of Hebrews and a master teacher and, therefore, not a linear thinker. Here is an example; He might ask you to provide him with the answer to the equation 2+2 = what number? You'd say, "4," but he is expecting you to respond with the following answer, "What is the square root of 16?

To my direct, or linear Western mind, this is just wasting time... let's cut to the chase: The answer is 4! Paul, on the other hand was a man of giant intellect in all things theological, a master. He simply juxtaposed Romans 7 with Romans 8. Chapter 7 sets out the hopeless problem that leaves us treading water in a sea of despair but Chapter 8 provides the glorious solution, "There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit." Romans 8:1 NKJV (emphasis provided)

Wow, we must walk according to the Spirit! We must be "in" Christ. Notice, this reaches outside of ourselves—past the bounds of my continual failure. Victory is all about God! Then Paul continues, "Those who obey their human nature cannot please God. But you do not live as your human nature tells you to; instead, you live as the Spirit tells you to—if, in fact, God's Spirit lives in you. Whoever does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him." Romans 8:8, 9 Good News Bible (emphasis provided)

Again, the vital point to our victory is found in Christ. Remember His words in the Garden, "I will put enmity" between you and the devil. Genesis 3:15. If we are to "Overcome," we must invite the Spirit (the enmity provider) to reside within us (internally) in order to repel the continual onslaught from the evil one that pounds against us externally.

Here is the key to ultimately setting side-by-side with God in His throne, "Behold, I stand at the door and knock," says Jesus, "If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and will dine with him and he with Me." Revelation 3:20. (emphasis provided)

Our part of overcoming is absolute surrender, allowing God to live in us, thus, He provides overwhelming power to repel the devil. Here was my problem: I credited the devil with far too much power and my "surrender" was not absolute. Here's a question, Is the devil stronger than God? Think long and hard before you answer.

Following His baptism, the Spirit guided Jesus into the desert where, after 40 days of fasting, He encountered the deceptions, lies, and cloaked rage of the devil... the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes and the pride of life. It was all there, every temptation that is common to humanity, beat against Jesus in His weakened condition. But, if we are to overcome as Jesus did, we must be fortified with the Holy Spirit, as He was.

It is true that Satan has real power—and lots of it, but **GOD HAS FAR MORE!** Jesus laid aside all of His own divine power when He came to earth (See Philippians 2). He showed us how we may gain victory after victory, becoming "Overcomers." Our daily prayer must be, "Please Father, take my heart, for I cannot give it. Send your Sprit into my life, abide in me and give me victory."

The devil will do anything he can to try and make you give up, beating you down so you won't get back up. He does not want you to discover that the power of God is well able to lead you from victory unto victory—to overcome his every temptation.

When you feel discouraged, don't give up, because our Substitute—Christ—saved us while we were yet sinners. You are precious in His sight. But there is even more than encouragement alone: Jesus' life and death provides the power to "Go and sin no more." He went head-to-head, nose-to-nose, toe-to-toe, with the devil and defeated him at every turn, from Bethlehem to Calvary. Every step of the way, Jesus kept choosing God and, in His Father's power, He became an overcomer—our example. This is His promise to us, "To him who overcomes I will grant to sit with Me in My throne, even as I also overcame and have sat down with My Father in His throne." Revelation 3:21. (emphasis provided)

Please don't miss this: Jesus gained the victory over sin by inviting the Father to abide in Him. He then told us to do the same: "I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done." John 13:15.

"The high and holy privilege of overcoming as Jesus overcame, through power imparted from above, is given to those who conscientiously do all in their power to co-operate with the Source of their strength" Canadian Union Messenger, September 3, 1907, page 6.

I'm afraid those who marginalize the words of Jesus to, "Go and sin no more," will be in for a rude awaking. The final chapter in the last book of the Bible makes it plain—delivering this pronouncement just prior to His return, "He that is unjust, let him be unjust still: and he which is

filthy, let him be filthy still: and he that is righteous, let him be righteous still: and he that is holy, let him be holy still." Revelation 22:11.

The meaning of the Greek in this pronouncement is very plain. Whatever you are doing now, you will continue to do. When Christ throws down the censor in preparation to exit the temple and heaven, our destiny is fixed for all eternity. Whatever you have been doing you will keep on doing—judgement is set and Jesus comes. "And, behold, I come quickly; and my reward is with me, to give every man according as his work shall be." Revelation 22:12. (underlining provided)

There is a powerful statement that speaks to this event "The traits of character you cherish in life will not be changed by death or by the resurrection. You will come up from the grave with the same disposition you manifested in your home and in society. <u>Jesus does not change the character at His coming</u>. The work of transformation must be done now. **Our daily lives are determining our destiny**." The Adventist Home, page 16 (emphasis provided)

Billy Sunday once said; "Temptation is the devil looking through the keyhole, yielding is opening the door and inviting him in." Understand this; temptation is not sin—only when you yield have you fallen.

Dear reader, invite Jesus to live in you and let Him deal with the devil knocking at the door. "Temptation, however strong, is never an excuse for sin...He [Jesus] knows how strong are the inclinations of the natural heart, and He will help in every time of temptation." Testimonies Volume 5, page 177.

It took some time but Peter finally got it, "The Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptations...." 2 Peter 2:9. Did you catch what he said? Jesus will deliver us OUT of temptation. This is just what the angle told Joseph in the dream, "And she [Mary] shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name JESUS: for he shall save his people from their sins." Matthew 1:21 (emphasis provided). Notice, the angel did not say Jesus would save us IN our sins but FROM! There is an eternity of difference between those two words.

The devil works to keep your focus on just one-half of the Lord's plan of salvation. He's figured out how to separate the saving death of Jesus on the cross from His current work as our High Priest in heaven. In so doing, the attention of most Christians is no longer on the Lord's complete victory over sin, which translates into our freedom *from* sin. Grace alone does not comprise the complete plan of salvation. There must be a turning-away from sin (Sanctification) as well. The devil is happy if we fall into either ditch as we travel the road of life; grace alone or works. Jesus is looking for transformation—all supplied through the saving power of God.

In his book *The Vanishing Conscience* page 222, John MacArthur speaks plainly of the problem that plagues us and the goal every Christian must pursue in order to take hold of the true grace offered by God to fallen man: "Grace is to free us *from* sin ... much more than forgiveness for our sins, or a free ride to heaven. ... Grace is no sanction for sin. On the contrary, it grants the sinner freedom from sin ... it frees us to obey God."

Ok, now you know that the plan is to separate you FROM sin, which results in overcoming in this life. Hence, the goal is to reestablish your royalty—the royalty lost in Eden by your multigreat grandparents—enabling you to, one day, join Jesus in His Father's throne and rule the

universe with Him. But let's talk more about the HOW. That was my hang up for many years. I didn't understand how overcoming actually works.

Let's take a closer look into what is needed for us to "Go and sin no more." Look at this statement: "Everyone may place his will on the side of the will of God, may choose to obey Him, and by thus linking himself with divine agencies, he may stand where nothing can force him to do evil." Child Guidance, page 209.

It's called surrender. I must fully surrender myself to God. James got it when he wrote, "Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you. Cleanse your hands, ye sinners; and purify your hearts, ye double minded. Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and he shall lift you up." James 4:7, 8, 10. These words should jump off of the page and shout to us; Wake up! Wake up!

But again, I had a problem. I was still trying to lift myself up. You know what it's called: **works religion.** I wanted to help God do His job, and in the process, I continued to fail miserably.

Then God impressed me to read through my entire Bible while on a vacation in Guatemala and highlight every place it spoke of God's power, His desire to separate us from sin, and His plans to make us overcomers. Wow! When I was done, a major portion of my Bible was highlighted in yellow.

He then impressed me to study to see what the Spirit of Prophecy had to say. I began building a PowerPoint presentation using the same criteria I had selected for highlighting my Bible. In no time I had one hundred slides. I spent the next two years exchanging slides, building, changing. I eventually realized that transformation (overcoming) is the overarching theme in both the Bible and the Spirit of Prophecy—thousands of texts and statements point to this fact. For well over one hundred years, Jesus has been patiently waiting for us to get it.

God spoke to me as I read the following statement:

"It is His purpose that the highest influence in the universe, emanating from the Source of all power, shall be theirs. They are to have power to resist evil, power that neither earth, nor death, nor hell can master, power that will enable them to overcome as Christ overcame." Gospel Workers, page 39.

These words spoke of a power outside of myself. Could this be the enmity spoken of by Jesus in the Garden? I read and re-read much of what I shared with you in the early parts of this article but it just didn't sink in. Now the light was starting to grow brighter. I needed power... but I had none of my own.

Then I read the dramatic story of two disciples in Luke chapter 24 that offers us an idea of how important Jesus' connection with God and with us really is.

The two disciples from Emmaus had their dreams crushed when they stood among the crowd watching Jesus suffer and die. It was over, and so were their lives. Now, every inch of the rock-strewn road seemed to rise up and taunt them. Their seven-mile journey was all downhill and so, it seemed, would be the remaining days of their lives.

Presently, a stranger drew near and asked them why they were so sad. Cleopas responded, "Are You the only stranger in Jerusalem, and have You not known the things which happened

there in these days?" And with quivering lips, they both added, "We were hoping that it was He who was going to redeem Israel." Luke 24:18, 21

Overflowing with despair, their eyes were hidden from the very One they desired to see again. Perhaps waiting for the perfect teachable moment, the Stranger allowed the scales of darkness to remain upon their eyes. It gave Him opportunity to first unfold the beauty of the Messiah found throughout their sacred scriptures. His great desire was to abide with them and to dispel every shred of darkness that was choking out the Light. The farther they traveled and the longer they listened, the two disciples began to notice their hearts were aching far less as the Light found His way into their hearts.

Now, with the sun disappearing behind the hills as they neared their home, the Stranger indicated that He would continue on His journey alone. But the two disciples were desperate to hear more! They quickly took the initiative to press Him to stay with them awhile longer. They urged, "Abide with us, for … the day is far spent." Luke 24:29. They were relentless in their invitation—He agreed to break bread with them before going on.

Taking His place at the table, the Stranger blessed the food in a way that Jesus had always done. Some have suggested that in the moment He raised His hands with the bread, the nail prints came into view and the disciples recognized Jesus. You can just about hear their explosion of joy—and then *poof*, He vanished from their sight. In giddy excitement they exclaimed, "Did not our heart burn within us while He talked with us on the road, and while He opened the Scriptures to us?" Luke 24:32.

There it is—the key to overcoming. Do you see it? The two disciples had been so weighed down with remorse. To them, it seemed the world would end. Without Jesus, life was meaningless. So, what changed?

After having spent time with Jesus they pressed the invitation upon this Stranger to come in and *abide* with them. They wouldn't take no for an answer. Once he entered their home, their eyes were opened—wide open—and they saw Jesus. Then what happened? By their own testimony, their hearts burned within them. I would submit to you that had they not spent time with Jesus and invited Him into their home, there would have been no burning.

We are led to ask, what was the burning? Do you remember on the day of Pentecost that tongues of fire fell upon the waiting disciples? They were seeking God with all of their hearts and fire fell upon them in answer to their seeking. Fire is representative of the Holy Spirit. The sacred Fire of God destroys sin and fills the vacuum in the Saints. "For our God is a consuming fire." Hebrews 12:29.

Cleopas and his friend experienced the fire of the Spirit applied to their hearts that night. The consuming presence of Jesus burned out all of Satan's lies and set them free! Remember, evil cannot live in the sight of a Holy God. Hence, it cannot live in any life in which God has taken up residence.

I finally realized that my only way to "Overcoming" was to spend time—much time—in conversation with God and continually asking Him to **abide** within me. "Then the language of the soul will be, Lord, take my heart; for I cannot give it. It is Thy property. Keep it pure, for I cannot keep it for Thee. Save me in spite of myself, my weak, unchristlike self. Mold me, fashion me, raise

me into a pure and holy atmosphere, where the rich current of Thy love can flow through my soul." Christ's Object Lessons, page 159.

"The work of transformation from unholiness to holiness is a continuous one. Day by day God labors for man's sanctification, and man is to co-operate with Him." The Acts of the Apostles, page 532.

What is my part in the plan of salvation—your part? It is to place ourselves in a position of cooperation. We must choose to spend time walking and talking with Jesus. As we do, we will fall in love with Him and our greatest desire will be to have Him live within us so we can be changed into His image.

The Apostle John, also called, "The Son of Thunder," finally got it. When he did, he began spending far more quality time with Jesus. Then, rather than a son of thunder, he became, "The one Jesus loved." This transformation allowed him to write the Biblical narrative found in John chapters 13-17. Those chapters are not found in any other gospel. It you circle the word "abide" throughout the complete writings of John, you will discover that he used the Greek word, MENO, which means to stay, to continue, to remain, almost three times more than all the other New Testament writers combined.

The best rendering of John 14:10 opens our eyes to where the power of "overcoming" resides. It says, "The Father, abiding in me, does the works. Hence, the father speaks and acts through me. The Father is in me."

Are you tied of being a serial sinner? Are you afraid that you may not be prepared to meet Jesus when He comes in all of His power and glory? You need not worry if you spend much time getting to know Him and enjoy His company now. As the relationship grows, you will discover that you would rather die than knowingly wound the Lamb of God afresh.

"The will, refined and sanctified, will find its highest delight in doing His service. When we know God as it is our privilege to know Him, our life will be a life of continual obedience. Through an appreciation of the character of Christ, through communion with God, sin will become hateful to us." The Desire of Ages, page 668.

That's it! It is that simple. Jesus wants to become your best Friend, and in the process, transform you into His image. Which means you will automatically become an "Overcomer" and royalty. That is your ONLY work! Get to know Him as your Best Friend, surrender to Him, and you will discover that heavenly change are taking place in you just like it occurred in Mary Magdalene—the prostitute, the paralytic sinner at the Pool, and John, the "Son of Thunder."

Now, isn't it about time to radically turn your focus from the oppressing power of the devil and get to know the One Altogether Lovely? Jesus has been waiting for us for a long time. You do your part, and He will take care of the rest.

"As the will of man cooperates with the will of God, it becomes omnipotent. Whatever is to be done at His command, may be accomplished in His strength.

All His biddings are enablings." Christ's Object Lessons, page 333.