

OVERCOME THE PAST VERSUS FOCUS ON THE PRESENT

Man's Way Versus God's Way (Part 5)

In this series of feature articles, we have been contrasting man's way and God's way of dealing with the so-called "mental" problems of life. So far, we have considered:

<u>Contrast</u>	<u>Man Says</u>	<u>God Says</u>
Article #1	Follow the "Latest Research"	Follow the Scriptures
Article #2	Save self	Die to self
Article #3	Live by feelings	Live a disciplined life
Article #4	You are a victim	You are responsible

In this article, we address Contrast #5. Man says that you must focus on and overcome your past in dealing with your problems; God tells you to concentrate on faithfulness in the present and He will take care of the past.

Do past experiences determine our present and future behavior?

In the previous article, "Victim Mentality Versus Personal Responsibility," we stated that most humanistic counselors base their theories on the assumption that individuals are not responsible for what they call "harmful," "destructive," or wrong behavior. They theorize that society, family heritage, and the environment are the culprits.

Also, many counselors today assume that past events predetermine how a person responds to life in the present. Furthermore, they claim that unless the past is corrected (or "healed"), a person cannot have victory in the present. For example, ministries that concentrate on "healing" memories or "overcoming curses experienced by a previous generation" place great emphasis on dealing with the past.

What does God say?

In the previous article, we wrote that, according to *Ezekiel 18:2-18*, nothing in the past can force a person to behave in a particular way; nothing and no one can force a person to sin. We are not victims of our past; we can live in victory if we choose God's way (*Philippians 4:13*). Even our past is a tool in God's hands for our good, to develop Christlike character in us (*Romans 8:28-29*).

This does not mean, however, that we should ignore the past or try to forget it. Some suggest that we should forget the past appealing to the Apostle Paul's testimony in *Philippians 3:13-14*. These verses say, "... forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus." Here, Paul is merely pointing out that he is not depending in any way on his past accomplishments to have a right standing before God (see *Philippians 3:2-12*). He was not talking about unresolved sin.

How should believers deal with the past?

We should learn from our past without reliving it. We must deal with unresolved, unconfessed sins of the past whenever we are convicted of them by the Holy Spirit. Let's consider three different types of difficult memories a believer might have.

- If a believer is convicted of unresolved sin in his life, he must immediately confess it, seeking God's forgiveness. He should also thank God for His great mercy and grace because Jesus has already paid the penalty for the sin. Thereafter, every remembrance of the sin should be used as an opportunity to thank the Lord again for His great mercy and grace, and as a reminder not to repeat that sin.

If the person has not already dealt biblically with the sin in his past, he must repent, then develop a plan not to repeat the sin and to live God's way instead. Then, he is to seek reconciliation with anyone he has wronged, and make restitution if applicable.

- If a believer recalls a past wrong done against him, he must remember that God is sovereign and that He actively causes all things to work together for good to those who love God and are called according His purpose (*Romans 8:28*). This does not mean that God caused the wrong (*James 1:13*), but it does mean that God will use even that mistreatment for good to conform the believer to the image of Christ (*Romans 8:29*). Therefore, the person should consider the trial, including the present reminders, as contributing to his maturity in Christ (*James 1:2-4*). As he thanks the Lord for His sovereign work in his life and places his trust in God, the believer's faith will be deepened.

He must forgive the wrongdoer, if he has not already done so, and then go on living to please the Lord. As he blesses the person who has wronged him, he is blessed by God (*1 Peter 3:9*).

- If a believer has been told that he is suffering because of past curses, he must understand that God is more powerful than any curse, demon, or Satan. Those who belong to the Lord have the Holy Spirit dwelling within them and the Holy Spirit is greater than Satan who is in the world (*Romans 8:9; 1 John 4:4*). There is no evil spirit that can overcome the Lord in our lives. The believer must depend on God's promise that He will not allow any believer to be tempted beyond what he can bear, regardless of the source of the temptation (*1 Corinthians 10:13*). God holds each person responsible only for his own sins (*Ezekiel 18:1-20*).

Concentration must be on living faithfully in the present.

God urges us to be faithful (*1 Corinthians 4:1-2*) and to stand firm (*Ephesians 6:10-13*). Faithfulness is always performed in the present. (Certainly, we are to take care of unresolved sin because past sin that has not been dealt with is still in the present.) Our primary focus should be to keep the two great commandments – love God with our whole being and love our neighbor (*Matthew 22:37-39*) – which are kept in the present.

In *Galatians 5:16* we are told, "But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh." Notice that the focus is on the put-on, "walk by the Spirit." Our tendency is to focus on putting off the past; God says focus on walking faithfully in the present. Isn't it wonderful that He sovereignly takes care of our past and future? All we need to be concerned about is the present.

As a believer, you are to put on the full armor of God and stand firm. The pieces of the armor are God's truth (*Ephesians 6:14*), living righteously (*Ephesians 6:14*), spreading the gospel (*Ephesians 6:15*), living by faith (*Ephesians 6:16*), putting on and living out our salvation daily (*Ephesians 6:17; Philippians 2:12*), and practicing God's Word (*Ephesians 6:18*). In addition, you are to be on the alert, praying at all times in the Spirit (*Ephesians 6:17*). This is a description of the victorious life. It is godliness in the present circumstances and relationships.

When you live a godly life and stand firm, God says that Satan will flee from you (*James 4:7*) and you will be strengthened and established (*1 Peter 5:8-10*).

NOTE: Much of the information in this article is taken from the **Self-Confrontation** manual and its accompanying **Instructor's Guide**.