

Being an Overcomer

There is an obvious difference between mere churchgoers and true disciples of Christ. John often uses the word “overcome” to show that the Christian life is to be a victory over the world and its influences. 1 Jn. 5:4-5 – “For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world: and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith. Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God?”

The Bible uses the word “overcome” in warnings, admonishments, and promises. To overcome means to prevail in some conflict or battle. We as Christians find ourselves in many battles. We are in a spiritual battle against Satan, the enemy of our souls, against demonic principalities and powers that are working against God and even morality in general in government and society and in the churches, and also in a battle against our own flesh.

Sometimes it may appear that we have been beaten in a battle, and yet we have actually overcome. For example, the martyrs in church history were killed by the state or the Catholic church, and yet their views and goals and life’s purposes were vindicated and won out in the end. Also in Dan. 11:32-35, speaking of the reign of the Antichrist in the last days, it says the people that do know their God shall be strong and do exploits, yet will fall by the sword and flame and captivity. It says some of them will fall, “to try them, and to purge, and to make them white.” Then in 12:10, “Many shall be purified, and made white, and tried; but the wicked shall do wickedly: and none of the wicked shall understand; but the wise shall understand.”

Even in Jesus’ crucifixion, what appeared to onlookers as a defeat turned out to be the great Victory. He told his disciples in Jn. 16:20, “ye shall weep and lament, but the world shall rejoice: and ye shall be sorrowful, but your sorrow shall be turned into joy.” And in 16:33, “These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world.” Jesus could say “I have overcome the world” right on the eve of what appeared to the world as his utter defeat.

Also in the book of Revelation, we see multitudes of martyrs before the throne. 7:9-17 shows them in heavenly victory, worshipping God and the Lamb. The world undoubtedly will have seen them as miserably defeated losers, but in the end they stand before God with robes made white in the blood of the Lamb, and he feeds them, leads them to living waters, and wipes away all tears from their eyes.

Even in such mundane things as the loss of a job, because you will not compromise a stand on truth and the Bible, you overcome. Perhaps you lose a job or a friend or a monetary opportunity, but by standing firm on the Word you gain the real victory and an everlasting testimony.

How do we overcome? Rev. 12:11 says “And they overcame him [*i.e., Satan*] by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony: and they loved not their lives unto the death.”

In the letters to the seven churches of Asia in Rev. 2-3, each message ends with a promise to those who overcome, according to the circumstances of each church. These same messages apply to us.

1. To the church at Ephesus (2:1-7)

“To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God.”

This promise is in light of his rebuke, that they had left their first love, and that they needed to remember from where they had fallen, to repent, and do the first works.

2. To the church at Smyrna (2:8-11)

“He that overcometh shall not be hurt of the second death.”

Their particular difficulty was persecution, but he told them “be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life.”

3. To the church at Pergamos (2:12-17)

This church was commended for holding fast to the name of Christ and not denying the faith, but was rebuked for tolerating the pernicious doctrines of Balaam and the Nicolaitanes. The doctrine of Balaam (from the book of Numbers) is polluting God’s people with idolatry, and that of the Nicolaitanes, I believe speaks of those who “conquer the laity” by establishing a hierarchical priesthood to rule over the believers.

To those who responded to his warning he says “To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the hidden manna, and will give him a white stone, and in the stone a new name written, which no man knoweth saving he that receiveth it.”

4. To the church at Thyatira (2:18-29)

This church came in for the severest rebuke, for allowing a false prophetess Jezebel, to teach and to seduce the members of the church to great sexual and idolatrous sins. But to those in the church who had not fallen to her wiles, he told to hold fast to what they have until Jesus comes.

“And he that overcometh and keepeth my works unto the end, to him will I give power over the nations: and he shall rule them with a rod of iron; as the vessels of a potter shall they be broken to shivers: even as I received of my Father. And I will give to him the morning star.”

5. To the church at Sardis (3:1-6)

This church was rebuked for the falseness of their reputation. “I know thy works, that thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead. Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die: for I have not found thy works perfect before God.”

“He that overcometh, the same shall be clothed in white raiment; and I will not blot out his name out of the book of life, but I will confess his name before my Father, and before his angels.”

6. To the church at Philadelphia (3:7-13)

This church was commended for keeping Jesus’ word and not denying his name, even though they had little strength. Because they kept the word of his endurance, he said he would keep them from the hour of temptation which will come on all the earth. We believe that this means the faithful church will be raptured before the great Tribulation.

“Him that overcometh will I make a pillar in the temple of my God, and he shall go no more out: and I will write upon him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, which is new Jerusalem, which cometh down out of heaven from my God: and I will write upon him my new name.”

7. To the church at Laodicea (3:14-22)

Laodicea is infamous as the lukewarm church. Jesus says he would rather we be cold than lukewarm! Be hot or be cold, but get off the fence! What is more dishonoring to God, than someone who claims to be a Christian, and yet is lackadaisical and lukewarm, and “ho-hum”? Many Christians are satisfied with their spiritual condition (“I believe in God. I pray sometimes, and read the Bible sometimes, and go to church often enough. I never murdered anyone, and am generally as good as the next guy.”) Where is the fire? the zeal, the love of your Savior? Is grace given to us just so we can live comfortably in this world, and not be bothered by a guilty conscience? Are we making any attempt to actually obey Christ, or are we going to be those who say to him, “Lord, Lord” and he responds “I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity.” Lk. 6:46 – “And why call ye me Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?”

“To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne.”

So in a summary of Rev. 2-3, overcomers are characterized by these things:

- They maintain their first love, resisting the downward drift of lessening fervor.
- They do not abandon the faith even in the face of severe persecution.
- They hold fast to the faith and do not permit false teachings in the church.
- They maintain sexual purity in the church, and do not abide by the degraded morality of the world.
- They make sure that their reputation as believers is justified, that they are not falsely called Christians.
- They patiently endure by using what strength they do have.
- They resist every temptation to lukewarmness and worldly satisfaction. They respond to Jesus’ invitation to personal fellowship.

To each of the seven churches, he finishes with “He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto his churches.” So the question for each of us is where we fit in these spiritual descriptions. Are we overcoming, or do we need to repent and get back on the right track? So far it is not too late, but we need to respond now.

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