

Checkin' Out My Walk  
#34 -Called To Be An Overcomer

Truth: 1. ALL born-again children of God are overcomers in Christ > POSITIONALLY.

2. Many believers are not overcomers in their daily experience or condition in life.

Question: Does Scripture exhort every believer to be an overcomer so he might have positions of authority in the coming kingdom of Jesus Christ?

Rev. 3:21 "To him who overcomes will I grant to sit with Me on My throne [Throne of David ruling from Jerusalem] as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne."

Heb. 9:14 how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?

Belief: Our life on earth is the training, proving and testing ground for our future life.

D. L. Moody: "The Overcoming Life"> "The Bible was not given to increase your knowledge, but to change your life. I have an idea that we are down here in training, that God is just polishing us for some higher service." [of His Kingdom> there will be no end!]

I Pet. 1:7 that the genuineness of your faith, *being* much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ,

Gen. 1:26-28 God said, "Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth." So God created man in His *own* image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. Then God blessed them, and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it; have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over every living thing that moves on the earth."

Satan usurped man's dominion over the earth through the fall of Adam and Eve.

Man forfeited his mandate to rule and have dominion.

God's marvelous plan of redemption provides the way through Jesus Christ for man to be reconciled to God. He calls His children to be "conformed to the image of Jesus Christ" through the process of sanctification [power of Holy Spirit & Word of God].

At His 2<sup>nd</sup> coming, Jesus Christ will take back dominion of the world and set up His Kingdom on a restored Earth [Garden of Eden]. God calls His children to be overcomers to share in His Kingdom.

Prov. 18:13 He who answers a matter before he hears *it*, *It is* folly and shame to him.

Acts 17:11 These were more fair-minded than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness, and searched the Scriptures daily *to find out* whether these things were so.

Consider: The Bema Seat [Judgment Seat Of Christ] after the Rapture:

II Cor. 5:9-10 Therefore we make it our aim, whether present or absent, to be well pleasing to Him. For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive

the things *done* in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad.

I Cor. 3:10b-15 But let each one take heed how he builds on it. For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if anyone builds on this foundation *with* gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, each one's work will become clear; for the Day will declare it, because it will be revealed by fire; and the fire will test each one's work, of what sort it is. If anyone's work which he has built on *it* endures, he will receive a reward. If anyone's work is burned, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire.

Promises to the overcomer in Revelation 2 and 3 present us with some important, but difficult questions that need to be answered in order to properly interpret and apply these promises. As usual with difficult passages, students of the Word are divided on the answers.

Keep in mind: Jesus told each church: "I KNOW YOUR WORKS"

Who is the overcomer and what is the nature of the promises?

(1) Are these warnings against the loss of salvation as some have advocated?

(2) Is "overcomer" a title for all believers because of initial faith in Christ?

In other words, does I John 5:5 define the overcomers of Revelation 2 and 3?

(3) Or is the overcomer equivalent to a special name for genuine believers because of the ultimate triumph of their faith?

(4) Is this a warning against false profession or is it a challenge and motivation to all believers to faithfulness for rewards?

## I. The Principle of Conflict

The term "overcomer" comes from the Greek nikao, "to conquer, prevail, triumph, overcome; to gain victory over something." Strong's #3528 - Verb- 28 times in 24 NT verses.

It calls attention to the presence of war, contests, battles, and conflicts in man's struggle with evil. The New Testament clearly teaches we are in a conflict, a holy war, with specific adversaries. After salvation, the conflict still rages in our lives.

A key passage illustrates the nature of our conflict with evil:

Eph. 6:12 For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places.

## II. THE ADVERSARIES DEFINED

(1) Satan, our chief adversary, the devil: I Pet. 5:8 Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour.

[Eph. 6:12; John 16:11; Col. 2:15; I John 2:13-14]

(2) The world, a system and arrangement of the affairs of men and government under the control of the evil one and opposed to God and His purposes for man:

[John 16:33; 1 John 5:4; Eph. 2:2]

(3) Indwelling sin or the flesh and all its corrupting power and life dominating patterns: Rom. 7:15; 8:4-8, 13; Gal. 5:16-26.

(4) Other forms stemming from the above three:

Col. 1:13 He has delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed *us* into the kingdom of the Son of His love,

Blindness (II Cor. 4:3-4), Death (Rom. 8:4f; Rev. 2:11), Evil (Eph. 5:16), Disobedience (Eph. 2:1), Rebellion in every conceivable form (2 Tim. 3:1f).

### III. The Provision of Victory -THE MEANS

(1) The Person and Work of Jesus Christ: Christ is *the Overcomer*, the ultimate source and means of victory. This is the great message of Scripture and everywhere evident in its pages.

John 16:33 These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace.

In the world you have tribulation, but take courage; I have overcome the world

Rev. 3:21 He who overcomes, I will grant to him to sit down with Me on My throne, *as I also overcame* and sat down with My Father on His throne.

Rev. 5:5 and one of the elders said to me, "Stop weeping; behold, the Lion that is from the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has overcome so as to open the book and its seven seals.

Rev. 17:14 These will wage war against the Lamb, and the Lamb will overcome them, because He is Lord of lords and King of kings, and those who are with Him {are the} called and chosen and faithful.

Rom. 8:37 But in all these things we overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us.

II Cor. 2:14 But thanks be to God, who always leads us in His triumph in Christ,

Col. 2:15 When He had disarmed the rulers and authorities, He made a public display of them, having triumphed over them through Him.

(2) The Ministry of the Spirit in Regeneration and Indwelling. Compare the following verses:

John 4:4 You are of God, little children, and have overcome them; because greater is He who is in you than he who is in the world.

I John 5:4 For whatever is born of God overcomes the world.

Note the emphasis here. The text does not say, "He that overcomes," as the NIV translates (the participle is neuter), but "everything or whatever is born of God."

Overcoming is specifically non-personalized in order to stress a point:

It is never the man that overcomes, but his birth from God and what that brings into man's life.

This is what overcomes or gives capacity to overcome the world.

I John 5:4-5 gives some insightful principles regarding those who overcome the world, namely: For whatever is born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith.<sup>5</sup> Who is he who overcomes the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?

(a) The source of victory is the new birth and the new life that it brings,

"For whatever is born of God overcomes the world";

(b) The method for appropriating victory is FAITH, "and this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith"

(c) The *object of faith* must be Jesus Christ because He is the real victor, "And who is the one who overcomes the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?"

#### IV. THE METHOD

(1) Faith (I John 5:4; II Cor. 5:7; Gal. 2:20; 5:5; Eph. 3:17)

I John 5:4 "This is the victory that overcomes the world—our faith."

Since victory was accomplished by Christ and not by what we have done, >

Victory Always Comes By Faith In The Work Of God Through Christ.

Truth: Our victory is not a victory to be won, but one to be claimed by faith.

II Cor. 5:7 For we walk by faith, not by sight.

(2) The Filling of the Spirit: Appropriating the Manifold Ministries of the Spirit

John 14:16-17 And I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever—<sup>17</sup> the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him; but you know Him, for He dwells with you and will be in you.

[I John 4:2-4; Eph. 3:16; 1 Cor. 12:12-13; Rom. 8:1f; Gal. 5:16f]

Though saved and identified with Christ in His life and death, all believers would be helpless to overcome because of the presence of the flesh without the Holy Spirit who is God's provision for strength and victory.

(3) Biblical Insight Through the Knowledge of God's Word (Ps. 119:9, 11, 45; John 8:32; 17:17; Rom. 10:17; Eph. 6:17; I John 2:13-14; Heb. 4:12; Col. 1:9-12)

Ps. 119:11 Your word I have hidden in my heart, That I might not sin against You.

John 17:17 Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth.

Rom. 10:17 So then faith *comes* by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.

If I am going to believe God's message of grace, trust God with my life, and deal with my inner man, I must know the Word. Faith and the ministries of the Spirit do not exist independently of God's precious Word. They are directly tied to knowing the Word.

The Word builds my faith, directs it, and the Spirit speaks to us through the Word.

Another element of victory and one vital for victory and fruitfulness > human responsibility

(4) Diligence, Discipline

Rom. 13:14 [PUT ON]

But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to fulfill its lusts.

I Tim. 4:7 [DISCIPLINE YOURSELF]

But reject profane and old wives' fables, and exercise yourself toward godliness.

II Pet. 1:3-10[APPLYING ALL DILIGENCE] His divine power has given to us all things

that *pertain* to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue, by which have been given to us exceedingly great and precious promises, that through these you may be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption *that is* in the

world through lust. But also for this very reason, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue, to

virtue knowledge, to knowledge self-control, to self-control perseverance, to perseverance godliness, to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness, love. For if these things are yours and abound, *you* will be neither barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. For he who lacks these things is shortsighted, even to blindness, and has forgotten that he was cleansed from his old sins. Therefore, brethren, be even more diligent to make your call and election sure, for if you do these things you will never stumble; for so an entrance will be supplied to you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Gal. 5:16 [WALK] This I say then, Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh.  
Eph. 5:18 [BE FILLED; Keep on being filled] be filled with the Spirit.

There is a fine balance we must observe in Scripture. Salvation and victory is completely of the Lord. We are to put no confidence in the flesh (Phil. 3:3). We do not overcome by our works, by the energy of the flesh, or by our sincerity, or by our effort, or by our will power because we are powerless. Nevertheless, victory requires our cooperation with God's operation. It means discipline, diligence, commitment to draw near to God and to act on His promises and provision by faith.

I Cor. 15:10 But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me was not in vain; but I labored more abundantly than they all, yet not I, but the grace of God *which was* with me.  
Philippians 2:12-13 Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for *His* good pleasure.

### INTERPRETATIONAL CONSIDERATIONS

It appears there are four primary views of the overcomer passages of Revelation 2 and 3:

(1) The Loss Of Salvation View: The promises are written to believers to encourage them to overcome lest they lose their salvation. To Fail To Overcome Is To Lose Salvation!

This view contradicts the clear teaching of Scripture: Believers are kept secure by the finished work of Christ. It is His record that keeps us not ours.

John 10:28-29 Jesus said, "I give them eternal life and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand. My Father, who has given *them* to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch *them* out of My Father's hand."

John 5:24 ...They shall not come into condemnation... but is passed from death unto life.

Rom. 8:38-39 For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Eph. 2:8-9 For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast.

I Thess. 5:10 Who died for us, that, whether we wake or sleep, [i.e., whether we are alert or spiritually slothful], we should live together with Him.

(2) The Perseverance Or Ultimate Triumph Of The Saints View: All genuine believers persevere and overcome the world by living godly and obedient lives. Overcoming is equivalent to faithfulness or obedience which proves the genuineness of salvation.

Bob Wilkin writes: The Bible does *not* promise that all true believers will live victorious, holy lives. Believers may have more than temporary setbacks and bouts with sin. It is sadly possible for believers to backslide terribly and to remain in that backslidden state until death. The church at Corinth was hardly a picture of believers experiencing ultimate victory over sin.

I Cor 3:1-3; And I, brethren, could not speak unto you as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal, even as unto babes in Christ. I have fed you with milk, and not with meat: for hitherto ye were not able to bear it, neither yet now are ye able. For ye are yet carnal: for whereas there is among you envying, and strife, and divisions, are ye not carnal, and walk as men?

I Cor. 11:30 For this cause many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep.

Belief: I believe there is no guarantee in Scripture that eternally secure people will live overcoming, victorious lives here and now. Believers can fail.

Note: Some of the Corinth believers died in a state of carnality as a direct result of God's judgment which Paul carefully defined as God's disciplinary action. God was dealing with them as His children [I Cor. 11:29-32]

(3) The View That All Believers Are Overcomers: All believers become overcomers the moment they believe in Jesus Christ. The very act of believing overcomes the world:

I John 5:5 Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that BELIEVETH that Jesus is the Son of God?

Faith, not faithfulness is the primary focus point in this position.

Ryrie writes: An overcomer is not someone who has some special power in the Christian life or someone who has learned some secret of victory. An overcomer is a believer in Christ.

Walvoord writes: "This promise should not be construed as reward for only a special group of Christians but a normal expectation for all Christians."

Wiersbe writes: A special word is spoken to the "overcomers" in each church. They are not the "super-saints" in each church, a special group that will receive special privileges from Christ, but the true believers in each of these churches. Those who truly belong to Christ are "overcomers"

This view is appealing but I think there are certain problems with this interpretation .

Does John's use of the overcomer expression in I John 5:4-5 dictate its meaning in Revelation 2 and 3?

The messages to the 7 churches in Revelation 2 and 3 present very different contexts than that of I John 5. I John 5:4 teaches us that the means of victory over the world is "our faith."

Verse 5 declares: The only ones who can overcome the world by faith are those who believe that Jesus is the Son of God. Why? Only these have experienced the new birth of God in spiritual regeneration. That regeneration gives the power for victory.

The context of the 7 letters suggests: John is admonishing believers to overcome specific trials and temptations. HOW? By faithful obedience through faith in their new life in Christ.

(4) The Rewards View: Overcomer passages in Revelation are promises of rewards given to believers to encourage them to overcome the trials of life through faithfulness.

J. Sidlow Baxter writes: But the promise is to "the *overcomer*." Are all believers "overcomers"? Let him think twice who would answer a dogmatic "Yes" to this question. These letters to the seven churches, at least, suggested otherwise to an unprejudiced reader.

Our standing in Christ is no artificial position of immunity. As there are degrees of punishment [in hell] so there are degrees of reward [in heaven]. One is made ruler over ten cities, another over five."

Barnhouse sees the promises to the overcomer as promises of rewards for faithfulness.

All the above agree: All believers are overcomers in the sense they have become children of God, have been translated out of darkness into the glorious light of Christ, have been taken out of Adam and placed into Christ. In this glorious position, they have become identified with Him as to His person and work, and enjoy many other marvelous blessings in Christ.

(Eph. 1:3; Col. 2:10). Every believer is an overcomer in that sense (I John 5:4-5).

But these expositors would also insist that all believers do not overcome absolutely.

Christians can fail to live for the Lord and overcome the desires of the flesh (I Cor. 11:28f; I John 5:16-17). The failure to overcome may be an indication of false profession.

However, the fact a believer does not overcome the struggles of life, does not prove they are not true Christians. True believers in Christ cannot lose their salvation, but they will lose or forfeit rewards as the Lord warns:

Rev 3:11 Behold, I am coming quickly! Hold fast what you have, that no one may take your crown.

[Apostle Paul's admonition in I Corinthians 3:12-15 & Col. 2:18]

Those holding to the rewards view: Overcomer passages are promises given to believers to encourage and kindle love and obedience in view of who they are in Christ and what they possess in Him and guarantees of special blessings or rewards for faithful service and lives of faith.

The Problem Discussed: Do the overcomer promises apply to all believers regardless of the kind of lives they live? I have become convinced that I John 5:4-5 is not synonymous with the statements of Revelation 2 and 3.

1. They occur in different books, with different contexts that contain a number of differences.
2. In Revelation, the overcomer concept is restrictive within the realm of the daily conflicts and battles of the Christian life according to the context of each of the seven letters. There are illustrations of the battles that believers must overcome and for which rewards are promised for overcoming.

"But this is a long way from saying: All Christians live ultimately victorious lives. Regardless many use I John 5:4-5 to interpret the overcomer promises of Revelation 2 and 3 because of the similarity of terms.

The Christian life is full of conflict, tribulation, and trials but VICTORY AWAITS all believers through the victory accomplished by the Savior, but it is a victory that must be appropriated by an active faith that is fed through fellowship with the Lord.