

HE THAT OVERCOMES ...

By Denver Cheddie

8 times in the book of Revelation are blessings associated with heaven and eternal life promised specifically and exclusively to those who overcome (2:7, 11, 17, 26; 3:5, 12, 21; 21:7). What does it mean to overcome? How do we overcome and thus qualify for the blessings that these scriptures promise?

The Wrong Interpretation

According to one understanding, these scriptures teach that in order to go to heaven one must be an overcomer i.e. one must overcome sin, temptation and worldliness. I have even heard a preacher theorize, "It is one thing to be saved, another to go to heaven. We are saved by grace through faith, but it is only when we learn to overcome are we qualified for heaven. Even those in heaven must learn to overcome otherwise they may fall into sin just as Lucifer did and backslide and end up in hell."

This is the most demonic false doctrine I have ever heard. This is basically a works salvation. It does not get more false than that. Rev. 20:6 cf. 21:8 makes it emphatically clear that those who are part of the first resurrection can NEVER go to hell. 1 Thess. 4:17 – so shall we ever be with the Lord. Furthermore, 1 John 3:2 says that we will be like Christ, not Lucifer. If the

Jesus you serve is capable of falling, then you serve a false Christ. My Jesus, GOD the Son, can never fall, and neither can I after I have already reached heaven.

Secondly this understanding of the word overcome is contrary to the use of the word in Revelation and the writings of John. There are basically 2 words that mean to overcome in the Bible:

- 1) ***katakuriuo*** – to exercise authority or literally to lord over (see Matt. 20:25, Mark 10:42, Acts 19:16; 1 Pet. 5:3, Gen. 1:28). If this were the word used in the book of Revelation, then it would mean that overcoming sin is necessary to go to heaven. It would also mean that none of us would ever go there.

- 2) ***nikao*** – to gain victory or prevail. It is used in a physical sense in Luke 11:22, Rev. 11:7; 13:7; 17:14. It is also used in a spiritual sense in John 16:33; Rom. 12:21; 1 John 2:13, 14, 4:14, 5:4; Rev. 5:5, 12:1, 15:2. It is the meaning of this spiritual overcoming in which we are interested.

1 John

In 1 John 2:13, 14 believers are said to “have overcome” the evil one. 5:4 sheds some more light on it. It is our faith (saving faith*) that causes us to

overcome. We have overcome the world and the devil the minute we are born again.

Revelation

There is also a future sense of overcoming. In Rev. 12:11, the tribulation saints overcome the devil by the blood of the Lamb and the word of their testimony. i.e. they have overcome by the blood (when they were saved), and will overcome when they hold fast to the testimony of Jesus. In 15:2 these same believers are said to have been victorious over the beast, his image and his number. How do they overcome the beast? They overcome by not succumbing to his threats and temptations. They overcome by not receiving his mark and refusing to worship his image. They overcome by holding fast to the testimony of Christ. Even though the beast physically overcomes them by killing them, they spiritually overcome him by not denying Christ.

In 21:7, 8, the overcomers in the tribulation are contrasted to 8 groups of people going to hell.

- 1) Fearful or cowardly – those who were afraid to stand for Christ choosing instead to take the “easy way out” by taking the mark of the beast and worshiping his image. They thought they got away from death.
- 2) Unbelieving – those who chose not to believe the gospel even though they saw angels flying the sky and preaching it (Rev. 14:6-11).

- 3) Abominable – those who indulged in idolatrous practices, prominent in the tribulation.
- 4) Murderers – those who executed the saints for the testimony of Jesus.
- 5) Whoremongers – the sexually immoral, again prominent in the tribulation.
- 6) Sorcerers – those involved in occultic practices, prominent in the tribulation.
- 7) Idolaters – those who worship the image of the beast.
- 8) Liars – false teachers, those who teach lies.

These are the ones who succumb to the prevailing spirit of the world. On the contrary the overcomers are those who refused to let go of their testimony in spite of the influence of the world.

The 7 Churches

Each of the 7 churches of Rev. 2, 3 are addressed by Jesus. All are commended on their good points (except Laodicea), all are warned about their shortcomings (except Smyrna and Philadelphia), and all receive promises for overcoming. In 2:26, the word overcome is defined by the phrase “and keeps my works till the end”. The basic message is that the believers started off well, but there were signs that they were succumbing to the spirit of the world. They needed to beware lest they went so far that

they eventually deny Christ and leave (as oppose to lose) their first love. They needed to overcome – resist this trend and hold fast till the end.

The Message For Us

When we got saved, we overcame the devil. But the spirit of the world, inch by inch, tries to influence us to deny Christ. That is after all the goal of the devil (Job 1:11). It is possible for a believer to apostatize (otherwise Rev. 3:5 makes no sense), but that does not happen easily. The devil's plan is to gradually bring us to the place where we will, of our own free will, deny Christ. Holding to the testimony of Jesus, in spite of all opposition is what it means to overcome.

(c) 2001 Denver Cheddie

All Rights Reserved

* The context would limit the meaning of faith to saving faith. Since the verse says that those who are born of God (saved) have overcome the world, the faith that overcomes could only mean the same thing. The context would eliminate any other type of faith being intended.