

The 'Overcomeths' in the Revelation.

by Daniel Steele

The Christian life is a perpetual warfare against the enemies of the spiritual life, and the rewards of overcoming include eternal life, power over the nations, and sitting with God on his throne.

Scripture: Revelation 2:11

Topics: "Spiritual Warfare", "Eternal Rewards"

Description

Daniel Steele preaches on the significance of overcoming in the message of Jesus Christ to the seven churches, emphasizing the continuous spiritual warfare in the Christian life and the need to conquer internal and external foes through faith. The rewards for overcoming are vast and varied, including access to the tree of life, protection from the second death, heavenly feast with Christ, power over nations, and the promise to sit with Christ on His throne, reflecting the brightness of His glory.

Transcript

In the message of Jesus Christ to the seven churches there recurs a favorite verb on which the destiny of each individual member turns. As the conditions of salvation are the same in all ages, we should understand what is implied in this verb to overcome, and how vast and various are the rewards which will follow the victory.

Chap. 2:7, "To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God." There is implied here that the Christian life is a perpetual warfare. For the verb in every message is in the present tense, which denotes, not singleness of action, but continuousness. There are foes which may be conquered so completely by the stroke of the omnipotent Holy Spirit that they are said to be crucified and destroyed. In Rom. 6:6 one of these foes is spoken of by name, "our old man." So long as he lives in the regenerate he is plotting to regain his lost dominion. Hence there is no safety except in his capital punishment. A dethroned, wicked king is always a menace to the successor, and a nucleus for a rebellion. On the principle, "better one die than many," wise statesmanship brings him to the block, as the stern guardians of Britain's liberties brought Charles I. Till that event there must be warfare with an enemy within. Afterwards the war is not what the Romans called an "intestine," but a "foreign" war. Many people think they must carry a civil war in their breasts till they drop into the grave. Not so the inspired apostles after the day of Pentecost. What are the foreign foes with whom we may never make a truce? One of them is the world, a term comprehending the sum total of the influences hostile to the spiritual life which flow from our social environment, its maxims, fashions, and principles. To these there must be a constant

resistance. Pleasures which becloud the spiritual vision must be denied; business must be conducted on the principles of New Testament morality, although these yield less immediate profit than the principles of current commercial morality; and voluntary social alliances with unbelief must be refused at whatever cost. In every case, the spiritual must be put above the material. Everything that puts eternal life in jeopardy must be thrust aside or trampled under foot. Only clear-eyed faith can do this. "This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith." By faith the things not seen and eternal are brought near, and are made more influential over conduct and character than things seen and temporal.

Another foe is the personal devil who will be spoken of hereafter. The reward here promised carries us back to the gates of our lost Eden, makes the sentinel cherubim sheath the flaming sword and open the bolted gate, and lead the conqueror to the tree from which Adam never ate. In chapter 22:14 we have a more minute description of those who will ultimately have access to this tree, "Blessed are they that wash their robes." -- R. V. Of course the purifying medium is the blood of the Lamb, as in chapter 7:14, where the washing and the whitening of the robes are spoken of, the former, according to Hengstenberg and J. Fletcher, denoting regeneration, and the latter entire sanctification.

It is remarkable that what the human race lost in the first three chapters of Genesis, believers gain in the first three in the Revelation. Had the Scriptures a different close they would make us all pessimists. As it is they open wide the door of hope.

Chap. 2:11, "He that overcometh shall not be hurt of the second death." This is the negative side of the reward figuratively expressed as eating of the tree of life. In a physical sense he may "be hurt" by the fires of martyrdom, but such is his grip of faith that he is lifted above the second death, defined in chapter 20:14 as the "lake of fire." When Polycarp was threatened by the proconsul with death by fire, he replied, "Thou threatenest me with the fire that burns for an hour and in a little time is extinguished: for thou knowest not of the eternal fire that is reserved for the ungodly." It is utterly impossible in the present life to have any appreciation of the unspeakable horror of the second death. Physical death, in point of suffering, is of so little moment that Jesus Christ drops it entirely out of view in his description of the future of the believer. "Whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die." It is for our spiritual health to keep in mind what we are saved from as well as what we are saved to. In both these texts the exemption from the second death is expressed in a double negative, which gives great precision and certainty to the promise as it stands in the Greek.

Chap. 2:17. For the special encouragement of the church in Pergamos, by reason of her dwelling where Satan's seat is, and where the fires of martyrdom had been kindled, a twofold reward is promised to the overcomer -- the hidden manna, and the white stone. The first symbolizes Christ himself, the true bread from Heaven. It is hidden, because our spiritual life, with its springs and nourishments, is "hidden with Christ in God." Every believer has meat to eat which the world knows not of. The best explanation of the white stone is that it was a small white marble ticket of admission to banquets. Both together, the manna and the stone, signify a heavenly feast with a right of way to it already assured. The new name is the new nature, as the name of Jacob was changed when the mysterious angel made him a "partaker of the divine nature." When Christ in his high priestly prayer (John 17:6) says, "I have manifested thy name," he means the revelation of the glory of his Father's moral character, -- love, holiness, justice, wisdom, and truth. Only he who has experienced this blissful change can have any knowledge of it, except the second-hand knowledge, which comes from the life and testimony of the regenerate.

Chap. 2:26, "To him that overcometh will I give power over the nations. And he shall rule them with a rod of iron," etc. This is a quotation from the second Psalm in which this promise is applied to the Son. The two texts are harmonized by the fact that appropriating faith mystically identifies the believer with Christ, in such a way that he may be said to reign in Christ, who also represents him. Though the saints have no subjects personally, yet are they kings in his royalty, sharing his glory; though they offer no sacrifices, yet are they priests in his priesthood, having his prerogative of access unto God; though they arraign no criminal, yet are they one with him in judgment, approving every judicial sentence. Even in this world the Christian governments dominate the pagan nations. But there is another promise, "And I will give him the morning star." In explaining these poetical words we will repress our imagination and use only our Biblical knowledge. In Chap. 22:16, Jesus styles himself "the bright and morning star." But how do I get a title-deed to this brightest star in the firmament? Peter (2 Pet. 1:19) answers this important question. "We have a more sure word of prophecy; whereunto ye do well to take heed . . . until the morning star (Alford) arise in your hearts." Study the Scriptures with faith, and the Christ portrayed therein as a historical person will enter your consciousness as a glorious reality. You will ask for no other credentials in proof of his divinity. It would be like lighting a tallow-dip to see the sunrise. St. Paul needed no human testimonial "when it pleased God to reveal his Son in me," nor was there any asking advice of "flesh and blood" whether he should herald the true Messiah to all nations. He had the morning star which lighted up every step of his journey, from Damascus to Nero's block.

Chap. 3:5, "He that overcometh shall thus be arrayed in white garments." -- R. V. The word "thus" refers to the fourth verse, where it is said that, "A few names in Sardis which did not defile their garments shall walk with me in white; for they are worthy." These are they who have not sullied the purity of their Christian character by the stains of sin. They are to have the high honor of walking arm in arm with our glorified Redeemer. He could walk thus intimately with none others without soiling his own robe.

Chap. 3:12, "Him that overcometh will I make a pillar in the temple of my God." We read in chapter 21:22 that there is no temple in the heavenly Jerusalem, but that "the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the temple of it." To be pillars in such a temple is to have a fixed and important place in the divine regard. In that glorious city, which is all temple, the victors of faith are its living stones and pillars. Many a worldly professor with a long purse, who has been regarded as a pillar in the church on earth, will be sadly disappointed in the future world. The eloquent J. N. Maffit was accustomed to scathe such, thus: "Ye worldly professors who think yourselves pillars of the church will soon find out that ye are only caterpillars in God's house." How different are those overcomers whom God will endorse first with his own name, and secondly, with the name of the New Jerusalem, and thirdly, with "my new name."

Chap. 3:21, "To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne," etc. I have always regarded this as the tallest promise in the whole Bible. Whenever I attempt in thought to scale its height, my head begins to swim and I give up the attempt. Does it mean that the law is to be so completely absorbed in love that we are no more to recognize its existence? Does it mean that God has so great confidence in the spiritual heroes who come up from earth's Waterloos and Gettysburgs with waving palms, that he can safely relax all authority over them, and seat them by the side of his crowned Son, reflecting the brightness of his glory? Says Bishop Butler, "There may possibly be in the creation beings to whom the author of nature manifests himself under this most amiable of all characters -- this of infinite, absolute benevolence . . . but he manifests himself to us under the character of a righteous governor." It may be that after their earthly probation the overcomers are to be the beings spoken of by this profound writer. At any rate, the outlook from the summit of this promise, to him who has nerves steady enough to climb up to

it, must be inexpressibly glorious.

Chap. 21:7, "He that overcometh shall inherit these things; and I will be his God, and he shall be my son."
-- R. V. We need a large volume to exhaust all the blessedness implied in sonship and heirship to God. Let each of my readers write that volume for himself. It would be a great means of grace. This Bible Reading would be incomplete without noting the weapons by which we may overcome. These are found in Chapter 12:11, "And they overcame him [Satan] by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony." This contest is in the form of a criminal suit. Satan appears as "the accuser of our brethren". There is no use in bringing in witnesses to establish the spotless innocence of our brethren, for they have all sinned and cannot make that plea of a perfect past. What plea will prevail? Acknowledge ourselves sinners, and then cry, "for me, for me, the Savior died." The blood of the Lamb is a plea that Satan cannot answer, especially when there is added the personal testimony to its cleansing efficacy. This rules the devil's accusation out of God's court. It is impossible for the righteous judge to condemn one bringing this plea, the blood of Christ attested by experience and perseveringly confirmed by a holy life before an unbelieving world. This is a fireproof safe which will stand the fires of the Judgment Day. There is no other.

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