

## He That Overcomes Revelation 2-3

“Victori spolia ire.” To the victor go the spoils. It’s a term that means the spoils of victory are the perks, bonuses or treasure you get from victory. In the old days of war, the winning army looted the countryside taking whatever they wanted – wealth, harvest, flocks. They were the spoils of victory.

Today it’s used more metaphorically. The victor gets a title, prize, award, or office. It could be a medal, a contract with some manufacturer or political position. It could be celebrity status, stardom, free gifts, media attention and the like.

In each of His letters to the seven churches, Christ offers spoils to the victor, rewards to those who were overcomers.

### “He who overcomes...”

These rewards will be handed out to all who overcome in each age throughout history – from Old Testament saints who are represented in Hebrews 11 to the last person who accepts Christ before His judgment. Let’s consider these points.

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## I. THE OPPOSITION TO AN OVERCOMER

Opposition is defined as something or someone who resists or combats another. They are in some way antagonistic and hostile.

Someone can be opposed to political views.

Someone can be opposed to religious views.

Someone can be opposed to ideological views.

Recently there has been growing opposition against Monsanto regarding pesticides.

This past week, government forces of the newly elected regime in Egypt clashed with supporters of ousted President Morsi.

We are in a war against terrorists who oppose our way of government and life.

In the letters written to the churches Christ reveals opposition to the church. We have a real enemy – one that is both seen and unseen. And we need to be wary of them.

To the church of Ephesus the opponents they faced were wicked men (v. 2). They are the ones who have out right antagonism on their mind and evil intent in their heart.

When Nehemiah returned to Jerusalem to rebuild the wall, Sanballot and Tobiah had every intention of thwarting his plans. They did all they could to oppose the reconstruction of the walls. They even sent falsified documentation to the King.

Before David became King, he faced the giant Goliath and the armies of the Philistines who defied the living God.

Later David faced King Saul who sought to end his life.

After he became king, his own son rose up against him to end his life and take the throne.

In Psalms David wrote about the many opponents who sought to destroy him.

Haman’s intentions toward Mordecai and the Jews were evil.

Daniel faced opposition for his faith in God by his peers who were jealous of his position and sought to have him discredited and destroyed in the lion’s den.

Christ was opposed at every turn by religious leaders who sought to discredit and destroy Him.

Paul opposed the church seeking to destroy it.

Paul was opposed by the Jewish leaders and then by the Roman government.

Hebrews 11 tells us of the followers of God who were ridiculed, flogged, chained, imprisoned, stoned, sawn in two, put to death by the sword, burned, destitute, persecuted, mistreated and on the run for their lives because of their faith.

There has been and always will be opposition for our faith by those who are evil.

Christ also says to the church in Ephesus that they faced opposition by false teachers (v. 2). From the beginning of the church at Pentecost there have

always been those who have perverted the truth of the gospel for their own personal gain. Some have done it intentionally, others have done it unintentionally. The latter have done so by misinterpreting the truth, but the result is the same – people are led astray.

From the Judaizers to the Stoics to the Mormons and other cults to the Jim Jones's of the world, many have come along and led people astray from the truth of God's Word. They are opposed to Christ and their tactic is a subtle twisting of God's Word, much as what Satan did in the Garden of Eden when he appealed to Eve on the basis that God was withholding something from them and that if she only knew the whole truth she too would become like God, something Satan wanted but couldn't have and was thrown out of heaven for. Or the Judaizers who came into town telling Christians that you need to also follow the Jewish traditions and laws in order to be saved. There are many false teachers today.

Christ reveals something else that opposes us. Anything that would take away our love for Christ is in opposition to the Christian. Those things are so subtle we don't know that they in fact are actually opposed to Christ and our faith. They become the pot of water that is slowly turned up.

There was also a group called the Nicolaitans. They were the group who believed that if you wanted to fully understand sin, you should embrace it. They were opposed to the straight laced Jesus followers who took the Bible literally and stood against immorality.

To the church of Smyrna Christ said He knew all about their afflictions. This is not referring to illnesses of some kind, but rather it speaks about opposition that comes from tribulation, hardship that results because of faith. Throughout church history there have been many who have suffered and died for their faith.

In the New Testament we see James and Stephen. We know Paul and Peter and John and the other disciples were martyred. There was Antipas of Pergamum and Polycarp of Smyrna. Of course we

could mention Zwingli and Hus and Luther and Wycliffe and today countless millions who have died in restricted countries because of the opposition to their faith.

Opposition also came from the Jews. We found that to be true in the city of Smyrna.

Then we also learned that in many of the cities if you didn't give allegiance to the local gods or to the Emperor you couldn't participate in cultural events, buy or sell in the market or even be part of the trade guilds. There was constant pressure to renounce ones faith or at least accept the other pagan deities along with your Christianity, after all those who practiced idolatry embraced many gods, why should it be different for the Christian.

We have the same pressure today. There's pressure from groups that want us to compromise our beliefs by accepting what they consider cultural norms – change with the times. There is pressure today from groups that want us to coexist with every other religion because after all, we all want the same thing – peace, Nirvana, Shangri-la, heaven, Utopia, enlightenment. This ideology stands in opposition to the Christian. You have your beliefs, I have mine, but let's get along anyway.

**Ephesians 6:12** identifies another form of opposition: **“For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.”** Satan and his minions will do all they can to oppose us at every turn. Satan is the prince of the power of the air. He has been opposed to Christ and all those who follow Christ. He is the one according to **I Peter 5:8** who as our enemy prowling around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.

The overcomer has a fierce opponent. Let's never forget that. The moment we think we can rest or let

our guard down a little is the moment the enemy will pounce. There is a lot of opposition but thankfully we have an example, one who is an overcomer.

## II. THE EXAMPLE FOR AN OVERCOMER

Prevalent in every town were temples to deities, the pagan gods they worshipped.

There was Apollo, the god of music, knowledge, light.

There was Aphrodite, the goddess of love.

There was Diana, the goddess of fertility and life.

There was Athena, the goddess of war and wisdom.

There was Dionysus, the god of wine and pleasure.

There was Asclepius, the god of medicine and healing. (He's the one with the temple that had all the snakes that would crawl over you.)

Then of course there was Caesar – Kaiser Kurios – Caesar is Lord.

Any god was acceptable as long as Caesar was worshipped as Lord. In one city, even the Jews gave in to that, but not the Christians. They could only claim one Lord – Jesus Christ.

Christ wrote to each church and in some way refuted the claims of their deities, much as God did to the deities of Egypt when He rained down the ten plagues.

Christ is the one who is love.

Christ is the one who gives wisdom.

Christ is the one who brings ultimate pleasure.

Christ is the one who brings healing. He can and does heal physically. He can and will heal spiritually.

Christ is the one who is Lord, sovereign, supreme.

But there is one more pagan god we haven't talked about. The Greeks had a goddess named Nike. She personified strength and speed. During the Titan War it was said that she flew over the battle field as the divine charioteer rewarding the victors with glory and fame. Nike is known as the winged

goddess of victory and we have come to symbolize her with the well-known sports brand of the Nike swoosh.

To each of the seven churches, Christ reveals Himself as the God of gods, the Lord of lords. In every case He is above all the other pagan gods of wood and stone. He is the ultimate victor and the only one who can give ultimate victory.

The noun nike means victory.

The verb nikao means to conquer or overcome.

**I Corinthians 15:33-58**

**Hebrews 2:14-15, 18**

**Hebrews 4:15**

Christ is the ultimate victor who becomes our example in how to overcome.

That He overcame temptation and sin gives us the ability to overcome temptation and sin.

That He overcame the devil using the Word of God following His 40 days of fasting means that we too can overcome the devil.

That He overcame death and the grave assures that we as well will overcome death and the grave. It does not mean that we won't see death or that we will never be entombed in a grave. It does mean that even though those may one day come over us as a result of sin's curse they will not hold us back. They cannot keep us down. They will not have power over us.

When Christ comes and the final trumpet call is sounded and the angel gives a mighty shout, the dead in Christ and those yet alive in Christ will be raised to meet Him in the clouds.

**Acts 2:24 “But God raised Him from the dead, freeing Him from the agony of death, because it was impossible for death to keep its hold on Him.”**

Because He was victorious over them we will be as well. What has no power over Him, has no power

over us. Christ has been victorious in everything and we have that victor through Him.

Because He is victorious and because we will be victorious, **I Corinthians 15:57** says that we are to give God thanks who makes this all possible.

Take a moment and thank Him that you will be victorious over death.

Take a moment and thank Him that you will be victorious over the grave.

Take a moment and thank Him that you can be victorious over temptation and sin.

When Satan is finally defeated and there is a shout of praise to Christ who brought the victory we will share in that victory.

What we could never do, Christ has done and given the victory to us. **How can we do anything less than to give Him thanks?**

When I was in college our track team participated in a relay race at Concordia College. Field events needed three participants. We only had two pole vaulters. I was to be the third. The only time I ever touched a pole in my track career was to carry it from the bus to the vault pit and back again. I had never vaulted. Our best vaulter worked with me for a couple weeks. He was the Michigan Class C pole vault champion. That day he vaulted 15' 2". Our second vaulter went 10' 6". I jumped a measly 9' 6" and the coach told me to stop at that height. On the jumps of our number one vaulter we won by 2" and got a trophy. Victory didn't come because of me, it came because of our number one guy.

When it comes to our victory, we have no bragging rights. Any victory that we have cannot be attributed to us, it's all because of Christ. We only have victory through Him. Let's never forget that.

Victory came in the wilderness when He used the Word of God to refute the attacks of Satan.

Victory came in the garden when He submitted His will to the will of the Father.

Victory came at the cross when He cried "It is finished" and then breathed His last breath.

Victory came at the tomb when the stone was rolled away and He was gone having risen from the dead.

If we are to overcome we must look to Him as our example and empowerer.

**How do we overcome?** By the blood of the lamb. Any of the forces of opposition we discussed earlier can only be overcome through Christ. **In response to that how are we supposed to act?**

### III. THE CONDUCT OF AN OVERCOMER

#### Romans 8:18-39 (vs. 37)

The word in verse 37 is hupernikao. **"We are more than conquerors."** It literally means we are over conquerors or we are super conquerors. But notice where the ability to conquer comes from. The text is very plain. It comes from Him who loved us.

It's not my wife.

It's not my children.

It's not my dog.

It's not my Dad.

They all love me, but they can't help me be a super conqueror.

He who loved me is none other than Christ.

Scripture reminds us that God has loved us with an everlasting love. He demonstrated His love for us in that while we were still His enemies Christ died for us. For God so loved the world that He gave.

So the end result is that if God is for us, who can really oppose us? Oh, there may be those who may attack the body and can put to death the flesh, but they can never take away what God has given us through the shed blood of Christ. They can never take away what matters in eternity. Paul started this passage by saying that the momentary sufferings

can't compare with what will be ours in heaven. Nothing can take that away. Nothing can separate us from His love. We will ultimately conquer over all those things – things in this world and things in the realm we cannot see.

As I thought about this passage my mind went way back to the early days of being at Barakel. There was a song we sang that comes from this verse. So I dug out my old Camp handbook from 1970.

### WE ARE MORE THAN CONQUERORS

We are more than conquerors through Him who loved us so  
The Christ that dwells within us is the greatest power we know.  
He will fight beside us though the enemy is great  
Who can stand against us? He's the captain of our fate.  
So we will conquer never fear – so let the battle rage.  
He has promised to be near until the end of the age.  
We are more than conquerors through Him who loved us so  
The Christ that dwells within us is the greatest power we know.

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We can become overwhelmed with so many things.  
We can become discouraged by tests and illness and work.  
We can become disillusioned when someone lets us down.  
We can become fearful about unemployment.  
We can become anxious about bills.  
We can become distraught from temptation.  
We can be overcome with pressure to give in to the old nature.  
Let's remember that in all these we are more than conquerors, we are super conquerors.

One day Jesus was talking with His disciples telling them about His impending death, that He would not

be with them any longer. He told them about the coming Holy Spirit who would be with them. They were puzzled by what Jesus said and filled with grief because of His words. Jesus concluded with these words to encourage them and us as well.

**John 16:33** “I have told you these things, so that in Me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.”

In the world there is trouble, but in Christ there is peace. What a contrast. Those words should give us peace and hope and even joy that we can overcome because He did. The things of the world may overwhelm us but in Christ we are overcomers.

What can I do to be an overcomer?

**I John 4:1-4**

This passage is a reminder that we must remember where our victory comes from, to remember that we are on the winning side, to remember that we belong to God and that the Christ who is in us, is greater than any power on earth or in the heavens. One author noted that “reliance on God is the secret to all victory.”

**Philippians 4:13** gives us the clue “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.”

**I John 2:15-17** gives us another clue. “Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For everything in the world – the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does – comes not from the Father, but from the world. The world and its desires pass away, but the man who does the will of God lives forever.”

How do we overcome?

1. You must remember that it is through Christ.
2. You must remember Christ lives in you and will strengthen you.
3. You must not love the world

4. You must obey God's Word
5. You need faith

### **I John 5:1-5**

If you want to be an overcomer in this world and in anticipation of the rewards that await you, you must have faith. This passage says the person who overcomes believes that Jesus is the Son of God.

Faith is simply taking God at His Word and acting on it. "Faith is not simply saying that what God says is true; true faith is acting on what God says because it is true." Faith results from maturing love for God. The more we love Him, the more we trust Him. The more we trust Him, the greater will be our victories in this life because we are depending more on Him and less on us. We learn to live in God's power by obeying Him. When we live in the power of Christ through His Holy Spirit, the idea in **I John 5:4-5** is that this is a continuous victory, we will keep on conquering.

Here's another key to victory in the here and now. **Galatians 5:16-17** "So I say, live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature. For the sinful nature desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the sinful nature. They are in conflict with each other, so that you do not do what you want."

The Spirit wants you to overcome while the sinful nature wants you to be overcome. They are in opposition.

We are victorious only because Christ is in us.

**Hebrews 12:1-3** provides some additional keys to overcoming.

Remember those who have gone before us and endured even in persecution. They are overcomers. Throw off things that hinder us from overcoming. Cast off sin, because that keeps us from pressing forward to the goal.

When we are most tempted to give in, fix our gaze on Christ who is our example of the ultimate in overcoming.

**Philippians 3:12-14** "Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead. I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus."

We can overcome or we can be overcome.

We can be overcome when we have friendship with the world. Samson serves as a good example.

**James 4:4** "...don't you know that friendship with the world is hatred toward God?"

We can be overcome when we love the world. **I John 2:15-17**. One of the saddest verses to me is in **II Timothy 4:10**. Paul was asking Timothy to come and help him because Demas who had been a faithful helper had left him. The text says he left him because he loved this present world. How sad to think that some have chosen to be overcome instead of being overcomers.

We can be overcome when we conform to the world. **Romans 12:2** (Lot's wife)

It is a great challenge to be an overcomer, but thankfully we don't have to try it on our own. Christ has already overcome and given us the Holy Spirit and His Word to help us be overcomers.

## **IV. THE REWARDS OF AN OVERCOMER**

### **Revelation 21:1-7 (v. 7)**

To the victor goes the spoils.

Each of the letters to the seven churches contains the rewards that will be given to the overcomers.

Since we have already dealt with them, let me just read them without comment.

**2:7**

**2:11**

**2:17**

**2:26-28**

**3:5**

**3:12**

**3:21**

The bottom line is this: an overcomer is one who has acknowledged and confessed His sin and by faith placed His trust in Christ as Savior believing that He is the only way to overcome sin and its grip. The result is that we become a part of His forever family. To be an overcomer is only made possible through the blood of Christ and by faith we appropriate it to our lives. Even though we deserve nothing, He gives us everything: permanent citizenship in heaven, and honor befitting royalty. And so it is that we conclude with the final remarks of Jesus to the church: **“He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.”**

“We are more than conquerors through Him who loved us so.”