

014: Not Hurt of the Second Death
(based on Ch. 13 from *The End of the Pilgrimage*)

I used to think all Christians are overcomers by nature of their position in Christ as children of God.

- But I have since learned the Bible teaches otherwise.
- Only faithful servants are overcomers.
- What is an overcomer?
- An overcomer is one who is victorious.
- In fact, the Greek word is *nike* – which also happened to be the name of the Greek goddess of victory.
- In Roman mythology, she was called Victoria.

In the spiritual life, we are in a battle.

- We wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities and powers (a spiritual realm).
- Yet we should not become anxious, for we have been given all the necessary provision for winning the battle.
- The provision resides in our spirit. He is called Holy Spirit.
- If we appropriate our provision for conquering the battles of the soul, we will be victorious.
- If we choose not to appropriate our provision, we will not be victorious in our soul.
- Over the course of a lifetime, believers establish a pattern of either victory or defeat — or we could call it walking in the flesh or walking in the Spirit.
- Those who have a constant pattern of defeat will not be declared overcomers at the Judgment Seat and will receive a negative reward.
- Whereas, those who have learned victory over the world, the flesh, and the devil will be declared victors and rewarded abundantly at the Bema.
- Of course, there are degrees of rewards too.

I believe a serious error has crept into the church in modern times, and it is the error that all Christians are overcomers by way of their standing in Christ.

- Follow that line of thinking out to its logical conclusion.
- If all Christians are overcomers, then there is no battle, for the soul has already reached its goal of complete sanctification, and no Christian could ever do anything to displease the Lord.
- If all Christians are overcomers, then why was Paul concerned about becoming a *castaway* as the King James puts it, or *disqualified* as the New King James puts it?
- Why did he press toward the mark?
- Why are we warned not to lose our reward (2 John 8)?
- Why are we cautioned about being ashamed when meeting Jesus (1 John 2:28)?
- If all Christians are overcomers, then what is the purpose of the crowns and the rewards in Rev. 2-3?
- What is the purpose of the admonitions regarding the Judgment Seat and the prospect of suffering loss?

The error of assuming all Christians are overcomers has fueled a lackadaisical attitude toward Christian living.

- It has unwittingly promoted licentious behavior, on the basis that we are all victors.
- What a huge mistake!
- Consequently, in the twenty-first century we are faced with multitudes of Christians who do not take the Judgment Seat seriously and who live unto themselves.
- The intent of this study is to wake up Christians to the truth and to help them prepare to hear *well done* at the Judgment Seat by becoming overcomers now.

The passage that is typically used to try to prove that all Christians are overcomers is 1 John 5:1-5

- **1** Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God, and everyone who loves Him who begot also loves him who is begotten of Him.
- **2** By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and keep His commandments.
- **3** For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments. And His commandments are not burdensome.
- **4** For whatever is born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith.
- **5** Who is he who overcomes the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?

Typical of John in the epistles, he states a positional truth as motivation for living out the practical application.

- In other words, John points to the provision within our spirit as the means of finding victory in our soul.
- He references the positional truth, the provision in our spirit, in v. 1a — *whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God* —
- and in v. 4a — *whatever is born of God overcomes the world.*
- That is positional truth, but it's not automatic; it does not necessarily equate to the experience of one's life and behavior.
- Granted, believers are the only ones to have the prospect of becoming overcomers (according to v. 5),
- but experiential overcoming is not guaranteed; it's conditional, based on obedience and faithful service.

Yet we have no ability to obey of ourselves, so we must access our provision so that we can obey (i.e., keep His commandments, v. 3).

- How do we access our provision to obey?
- the end of v. 4 tells us — by faith.
- the apostle Paul says the same in Rom. 5:2 — we access God's grace by faith.
- Peter says the same in 2 Pet. 1 — we have been given everything we need to be partakers with Christ in His divine nature and escape the world's corruptions.
- How do we access it?
- *by which have been given to us exceedingly great and precious promises, 2 Pet. 1:4* —
- and then Peter instructs us to add to our faith.
- The context of the passage dictates that it is sanctifying faith, not saving faith.

Faith is the victory that overcomes the world.

- But, again, it's not automatic in terms of daily experience.
- You must depend upon the Spirit of God who lives within your spirit in order to be victorious in your soul.
- Thus, John is giving us provisional truth as the basis for our practical behavior, and he's essentially urging us to access what we have by faith in order to be victorious over the world, the flesh, and the devil.
- He is not saying that all Christians are overcomers in the realm of their soul, their behavior.
- What he's saying is that all Christians have the ability to become overcomers, because of Christ who lives within the spirit aspect of their being.

On that basis, let's now go to Rev. 2-3 to see the special rewards that are promised to overcomers.

- These are the letters Jesus gives to the seven churches.
- They were seven actual churches during John's day, spread throughout Asia Minor, which is modern Turkey.

- They represent believers throughout church history.
- Jesus tells each one of these churches what He thinks of their spiritual condition.
- Then He promises a reward to those who take heed to the admonitions He gives to the churches.
- Those who are rewarded are called overcomers.
- The text makes it obvious that these rewards are conditional, based on behavior.
- So this has nothing to do with initial salvation of one's spirit.
- It has everything to do with soul-salvation, or what we commonly call progressive sanctification.
- These rewards clearly are not for all saints.
- They are only for those who overcome experientially.

Let me forewarn you that some of these rewards are enigmas, but Jesus has put them in His word for us to ponder, nonetheless.

- Incidentally, I don't believe our Lord wants us to ignore these passages, simply because they are puzzling.
- Surely that would displease Him.
- We must work through them and arrive at some conclusions, even if we can't be dogmatic.
- In this study and the next, I will share my conclusions, but I freely admit there continues to be an aura of mystique about them in my mind.
- Our purpose is not to exposit each of the seven letters in detail.
- However, we will explore each of the seven rewards given in these letters.
- In this study we will cover the first two, and then examine the other five rewards in the next study.

Reward #1: Overcomers will eat of the tree of life.

- **Rev. 2:7** To him who overcomes I will give to eat from the tree of life, which is in the midst of the Paradise of God.
- Knowing that all believers possess eternal life, what is the benefit of being able to eat of the tree of life?
- Remember that the tree of life was in the Garden of Eden, but it has disappeared for the past six thousand years and will return in the age to come.
- But it will not be on Earth; it will be in the midst of the paradise of God.
- In other words, it will be in the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of reward, which is only for the faithful, so that only the faithful ones will be able to eat of it.

What is the purpose of the tree of life?

- **Rev. 22:2** In the middle of its street, and on either side of the river, *was* the tree of life, which bore twelve fruits, each *tree* yielding its fruit every month. The leaves of the tree *were* for the healing of the nations.
- This seems to be describing a massive tree that bears twelve different fruits throughout the year.
- It does not grow on Earth; it grows in the middle of God's paradise (Rev. 2:7), which seems to be a reference to the city of reward.
- Since only the faithful will be in that realm, they will be the only ones allowed to eat of the tree.
- Apparently, the tree of life has a twofold purpose: first, various fruits that brings a quality of life for those who partake,
- and second, leaves that provide healing for the nations.
- Perhaps the leaves will be used for physical healing for those in the earthly realm of the kingdom, which only the faithful, who reside in the heavenly city, will be able to administer to those on Earth.

- The millennial kingdom will be characterized by healing and great power worked by the faithful ones.
- What a magnificent tree!

The Old Testament speaks of the tree of life symbolically.

- **Prov. 3:18** She (that is, wisdom) *is* a tree of life to those who take hold of her, and happy *are all* who retain her.
- Wisdom is likened unto a tree of life, a quality of life far beyond average.
- In the age to come, the tree of life may impart wisdom and knowledge to the faithful ones who are with Christ in the heavenly Jerusalem, so they will be more equipped to administer affairs on Earth and know more of the ways of God.
- Perhaps this wisdom will also give the faithful ones a greater opportunity to know Christ intimately.
- **Prov. 11:30** The fruit of the righteous *is a* tree of life, and he who wins souls *is* wise.

I believe “soul-winning,” in this context, is not a reference to pointing lost people to the Savior ...

- but is predominantly the idea of discipling saved people so that their soul becomes saved (i.e., sanctified) and ready to hear “well done” at the Judgment Seat.
- Those who do that are wise.
- The fruit of their life and ministry is a tree of life, and presumably, they will eat of the tree of life in the age to come.
- A passage in Daniel, while not specifically mentioning the tree of life, promises similar reward:
- **Dan. 12:3** Those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the firmament, and those who turn many to righteousness like the stars forever and ever.

- Those who teach others about the kingdom and help those saints to get their soul ready for the Judgment Seat will receive great reward.
- They will shine brightly and will eat of the tree of life in the heavenly Jerusalem. What a glorious reward!

Reward #2: Overcomers will be given a crown of life and will not be hurt of the second death.

- **Rev. 2:10-11** Indeed, the devil is about to throw *some* of you into prison, that you may be tested, and you will have tribulation ten days. Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life ... He who overcomes shall not be hurt by the second death.
- This is a rather peculiar reward.
- For it implies that those who are not deemed faithful will not receive a crown of life and will be hurt by the second death.
- But how can that be? We know the second death for the unsaved is the lake of fire.
- Saved people are eternally secure, of course, and will not spend eternity in the lake of fire.
- How do we make sense of this?
- The tendency of many dispensational preachers and teachers has been to see this statement and say, “That can’t be!” and then assume that all Christians are overcomers, making this promise apply to all saints.

Frankly, that is a hasty assumption and ignores the teaching of the Scriptures.

- When we come to a difficult passage like this, we must not invent a nice-sounding theological system so that we can fit certain verses into our paradigm.

- Rather, we must wrestle with the verse and see what God is saying, even if it goes against the grain of what we have been taught!
- What is meant by *second death* in this context?
- According to Rev. 20:14 and 21:8, the second death IS the lake of fire
- Unbelievers are consigned to eternity in the lake of fire – and even that might not mean what you think it does
- we will have to tackle that in a future study
- But as believers, our spirit has been saved, so even unfaithful believers will not burn forever in the lake of fire
- However, there is the very real prospect of our soul not being saved (sanctified), and if that is the case at the Judgment Seat, we will receive a negative reward.
- Part of that reward is being hurt of the second death.
- But what does that mean?

Let's begin to unravel this by reading the words of John the Baptist.

- **Matt. 3:11** I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance, but He who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.
- More specifically, Greek lexical aids suggest that the last phrase of this verse could also be translated, "He will baptize you *in* the Holy Spirit and *in* fire."
- The English word *baptize* is actually a transliteration (not a translation) of the Greek word *baptizo*, which means to immerse or submerge.
- It was the word used of ships that sank at sea.
- Thus, when John baptized, he immersed.
- He didn't merely baptize *with* water; he baptized *in* water.

- John here announces that Jesus will immerse in Holy Spirit and in fire.

Baptism in the Holy Spirit occurs when one's spirit is saved (according to 1 Cor. 12:13).

- When does baptism in fire occur?
- Presumably, at the Judgment Seat, when Jesus determines whether or not the believer's soul has been saved (i.e., sanctified unto completion).
- I will read 1 Cor. 3:13-15
- **1 Cor. 3:13** 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.
- **1 Cor. 3:14** If anyone's work which he has built on *it* endures, he will receive a reward.
- **1 Cor. 3:15** If anyone's work is burned, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire.
- **Heb. 6:8**, referring to unfaithful saints, says: but if it bears thorns and briers, *it is* rejected and near to being cursed, whose end *is* to be burned.
- **John 15:6** If anyone does not abide in Me, he is cast out as a branch and is withered; and they gather them and throw *them* into the fire, and they are burned.

Apparently, Jesus will baptize (immerse) in fire at the Judgment Seat.

- Some will be burned; that is, their works will be consumed.
- In that sense, they will be hurt by the fire.
- Could this be a reference to the fiery eyes of Jesus, as mentioned in Rev. 19:12?
- Perhaps, but it is not likely, because the believer will apparently be baptized (immersed) in the fire, and eyes of fire don't seem to carry the idea of immersion in fire.

- My opinion is that it must be referring to a furnace or pool of fire.
- So let's consider a *possible* scenario.
- We meet Jesus at the Judgment Seat.
- We all must pass through (be immersed in) the fire.
- What fire? We don't know for sure, because the Bible does not give the specifics.
- Could it be the lake of fire, also known as the furnace of fire?

I cannot prove that, but are you able to disprove it?

- Is it that far-fetched?
- Consider Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego.
- Their lives so pleased the Lord that He preserved them in Nebuchadnezzar's fiery furnace.
- In essence, God declared, *Well done!*
- Despite their baptism in fire, they were not harmed, not even singed.
- In fact, they emerged from the furnace not even smelling of smoke.
- For their faithfulness, God rewarded them with positions of rulership in Nebuchadnezzar's kingdom.

How could a Christian possibly be hurt by the second death?

- From the verses above, we know conclusively that every Christian will pass through a fire of sorts.
- Could that fire be the lake of fire, the second death?
- At that point in time, the lake of fire will not yet be populated by the unsaved or by Satan and his host; that happens after the millennium.
- The saved will not remain in the lake of fire, of course, but will merely pass through — be immersed in — the second death, according to the model I am proposing.

- After passing through the furnace of fire, some will come out unscathed (like the three Hebrew men in Babylon), for their works will be of the quality of gold, silver, and precious stones.
- The fire will not hurt them.
- It will be as if they are wearing asbestos suits.
- But other Christians will lose everything.
- That is, the quality of their work being of wood, hay, stubble — consumables — it will be devoured in the fire.
- They will be hurt of the second death, stripped of any prospect of reward.
- They will be saved, yet so as by (through) fire.

How do we explain their salvation?

- Because their spirit has been saved, made righteous, it will survive the fire
- But since their soul was never saved, it will be consumed in the fire.
- Jesus said, "Whoever saves his life (soul) now will lose it then."
- As we said in an earlier study, to lose one's soul is to lose one's reward.
- In other words, there will be negative recompense at the Bema.
- While I cannot be dogmatic about the scenario I have proposed above, it is a possible solution to the question,
- "How can saints be hurt of the second death?"
- If you have a better proposal, I would love to hear it!

We can easily connect spiritual death now (for the saint) with death of the soul, so to speak, at the Bema.

- Listen to Rom. 8:6-8
- **Rom. 8:6** For to be carnally minded *is* death, but to be spiritually minded *is* life and peace.

- **Rom. 8:7** Because the carnal mind *is* enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be.
- **Rom. 8:8** So then, those who are in the flesh cannot please God.
- These verses are written to believers, warning that carnality (i.e., continued fleshly behavior) results in spiritual death here and now, but spiritual-mindedness results in abundant life and peace.
- The bottom line is, those who live in carnality do not please God in the present.
- Needless to say, the present impacts the future.

Rom. 8:13 For if you live according to the flesh you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live.

- If you live according to the flesh (in the present), you will die (in the future); you will be hurt of the second death.
- But if you appropriate the provision of the Holy Spirit in your spirit, and thereby put to death the works of the flesh (in the present — Gal. 5:19-20), you will live (in the future).
- In the context of Rom. 8, the future death or future life are not relative to the spirit, for Paul is speaking to saved people.
- Paul is referring to matters of the soul which impact sanctification and reward.
- Thus, death or life relate to quality of living in the coming kingdom.
- Death for the saint equates to loss of reward and a portion in the darkness outside of His bright ruling realm.
- Life (i.e., the crown of life and eating of the tree of life) is the reward of faithful saints, an inheritance in His city of reward as the bride of the Lamb, ruling together with Him for eternity.

- Consider the contrast between carnal saints and spiritual saints

Carnal Saint	Spiritual Saint
Friend of the world	Friend of God
Ashamed of Christ	Bold & unashamed
Lives by sight	Lives by faith
Disobedient and disloyal	Obedient and faithful
Patterns of defeat — overcome	Patterns of victory — overcomer
Spiritual death	Spiritual life
Soul lost at the Bema	Soul saved at the Bema
Hurt of the second death	Inherit a crown of life
Outer darkness	City of reward
Mundane existence on Earth	Rule and reign in the heavenliness
No rewards	Rewards promised for overcomers
“You wicked & lazy servant”	“Well done, good & faithful servant”

You don't have to be hurt by the second death.

- The choice is yours.
- You can appropriate your provision, given to all saints, and live the Christ life.
- Jesus offers to fill you through His Holy Spirit and enable you to obey Him, and He offers you a reward.
- So why not choose life?
- I challenge you to THINK ON THESE THINGS