

## Q. In Revelation, Jesus speaks of those who overcome. What must I do to overcome?

A. The Scriptures you are asking about are Revelation 2:7, 11, 17, 26; 3:5, 12, 21; and 21:7. Many preachers, radio and television evangelists, and Christian writers utterly misunderstand and misapply these verses to support a false doctrine of works salvation or at least lessen the full scope of Christ's atonement. Certainly, these verses speak of overcoming. But do they mean that we are to *work* at overcoming?

First, let's look at the verses:

He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the assemblies. To him who overcomes I will give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the Paradise of my God.

Revelation 2:7

He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the assemblies. He who overcomes won't be harmed by the second death.

Revelation 2:11

He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the assemblies. To him who overcomes, to him I will give of the hidden manna, and I will give him a white stone, and on the stone a new name written, which no one knows but he who receives it.

Revelation 2:17

He who overcomes, and he who keeps my works to the end, to him I will give authority over the nations.

Revelation 2:26

He who overcomes will be arrayed in white garments, and I will in no way blot his name out of the book of life, and I will confess his name before my Father, and before his angels.

Revelation 3:5

He who overcomes, I will make him a pillar in the temple of my God, and he will go out from there no more. I will write on him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem, which comes down out of heaven from my God, and my own new name.

Revelation 3:12

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He who overcomes, I will give to him to sit down with me on my throne, as I also overcame, and sat down with my Father on his throne.

Revelation 3:21

He who overcomes, I will give him these things. I will be his God, and he will be my son.

Revelation 21:7

### **Misunderstanding: The Rewards Are for Believers Who Work and Succeed at Living an Overcoming Life**

One misunderstanding associated with these verses is that, while our salvation is by grace through faith in Jesus Christ as our Savior, the rewards in these verses are special and given only to those believers who live a life of overcoming. The thinking is, "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" ("Revelation - Appendix 3: Who Are the Overcomers?" (<https://bible.org/seriespage/revelation-appendix-3-who-are-overcomers>)). All believers are saved, but not all believers live a victorious, overcoming life. For those who do, there are appropriate rewards. For those who don't, well, too bad.

My response is that, without exception, not one of the rewards is something distinct from what we might expect for every saved person. In these verses, Jesus is assuring that everyone trusting in His atoning sacrifice on the Cross is saved, is an overcomer, and has these rewards. As we will see in more detail below, overcoming is not something above and beyond salvation but is intrinsic to it.

### **Misunderstanding: Overcoming Is a Struggle We Must Go Through**

What David C. Pack says in his article, "You Can Overcome and Prevent Sin" (<http://rcg.org/articles/ycoaps.html>) is typical of the way many miss the mark on the question of overcoming:

Overcoming is hard—difficult—it is a life-long struggle.... Yet, this world is drifting along, completely unaware of God's great purpose for man, which is to build character in this life. He is preparing a team of those who will qualify to be part of restoring His government to earth at Christ's Return.... Christ overcame and qualified to rule. Just as He

qualified to replace Satan, so must we!.... Overcoming will not be easy or happen overnight. It is a life-long struggle against well-established attitudes and a former way of life that the Christian has now rejected and turned from.

Admittedly, Pack says that to overcome, we need Jesus' help: "Without His help, you will get nowhere—fast!" But clearly Pack teaches that overcoming is something we must put our effort into.

Similarly, Isaya Owak quotes Jesus in John 16:33 and then completely misses Jesus' point:

"These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer I have overcome the world" (John 16:33).

Brethren, do we see how these come to us? Temptation and tribulation come in large and small packages. Even though these are coming to us, Christ says we have to overcome them to enter into the Kingdom of God.

Christ says He has overcome the world; will we overcome the world or will the world overcome us?

"We Must Overcome"

([http://www.coeternal.org/2000s/01068\\_0506wemustovercomeio.htm](http://www.coeternal.org/2000s/01068_0506wemustovercomeio.htm))

This is contrary to what Jesus was saying. Jesus is specifically telling us to cheer up and not worry over whether we will succeed in overcoming the world or whether the world will overcome us. We don't have to be concerned because Jesus has *already overcome the world!*

### **What Jesus Says About Overcoming**

Look at John 16:33 again: "I have told you these things, that in me you may have peace. In the world you have oppression; but cheer up! I have overcome the world." Pack's statement above, "Just as He qualified to replace Satan, so must we!" was in response to this Scripture. Did Jesus tell us we could have peace in Him and cheer up because He has overcome the world for us, or are His words only an empty pep talk? Did Jesus overcome the world only for Himself, and now we must accomplish this feat, too? Can we really expect to do something simply because Jesus has done it? I don't know about you, but I don't think I can fast forty days and forty nights. And I know that I can't die on a cross bearing other people's sins. So, why should I

expect to overcome the world? Jesus had power that I as a weak human don't have. Do other statements from the Bible back up Pack's interpretation that we must also do what Jesus has already done?

In Revelation 12:10-11, we read,

I heard a loud voice in heaven, saying, "Now is come the salvation, the power, and the Kingdom of our God, and the authority of his Christ; for the accuser of our brothers has been thrown down, who accuses them before our God day and night. They overcame him because of the Lamb's blood, and because of the word of their testimony. They didn't love their life, even to death."

Clearly, the saints overcome "because of the Lamb's blood, and because of the word of their testimony." Other Scripture also plainly teaches that believers overcome because of the Lamb's blood. Peter wrote, "Knowing that you were redeemed, not with corruptible things, with silver or gold, from the useless way of life handed down from your fathers, but with precious blood, as of a faultless and pure lamb, the blood of Christ" (1 Peter 1:18-19). The saints overcome by being redeemed by the blood of Jesus Christ. In other words, we Christians "have our redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace" (Ephesians 1:7; see also Colossians 1:14 and Hebrews 9:12). Our redemption through Christ's blood is the forgiveness of our sins, and this, in turn, is our overcoming.

What, then, is the "word of their testimony" in Revelation 12:11? Is this the difficult, life-long struggle that those who promote a Christian life of law-keeping and works speak of? No. Remember that the context is the throwing down of the accuser—Satan. Jesus' blood, His atoning sacrifice, completely defeats Satan. Because Jesus has paid the penalty for our sins and completely taken them away, Satan can no longer accuse us. But a way in which we assist in the accuser's overthrow is in letting the world know the good news of Jesus' victory. In other words, the "word of their testimony" is our proclaiming the Gospel. This does not win our salvation; Jesus has already done that on the Cross. But it is the outward call of the Gospel that spreads the victory and in which we have our part in bringing others to share in the salvation Christ has obtained.

Since our overcoming is the same as our salvation, and our salvation is by the blood of Christ and is entirely by grace (see Ephesians 2:8),

then our overcoming has absolutely nothing to do with a life-long struggle to qualify to replace Satan. Jesus has done that for us already. Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 15:57: "But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ." We are victors, we are overcomers right now. The apostle John also states this truth: "For whatever is born of God overcomes the world. This is the victory that has overcome the world: your faith" (1 John 5:4). When we are born again, we overcome the world and are victors because being born again and having God's gift of faith go hand-in-hand; and our faith in Him who has overcome the world is what gives us the victory. "Who is he who overcomes the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?" (1 John 5:5).

But what about Revelation 2:26? "He who overcomes, and he who keeps my works to the end, to him I will give authority over the nations" (Revelation 2:26). Doesn't this link overcoming with works? Yes. But notice that the works are not the Christian's, but Jesus' works. The overcomer is to keep or observe (*tēreō*—"watch," "keep an eye on") Jesus' works. Apparently, many in the assembly in Thyatira had taken their eyes off Christ and His finished work on the Cross and had turned to the works of the false prophetess Jezebel (verse 20). In verse 22, Jesus says, "Behold, I will throw her into a bed, and those who commit adultery with her into great oppression, unless they repent of her works." Notice that this is a matter of *her works* as opposed to *Jesus' works*. He who does not defect to Jezebel's seducing works and remains faithful to Jesus' gracious works is an overcomer who will share authority with Jesus over the nations. This verse has nothing to do with a Christian having to struggle to overcome. It has everything to do with a Christian wholly depending upon Jesus alone.

Jesus said in the first part of John 16:33 that in the world we will have oppression (*thlipsis*—literally, "pressure"). Yes, at times the world will pressure and oppress us. We may feel we are sinking like Peter into the water but when he cried out to Jesus, the Lord immediately stretched out his hand and caught him. Jesus also chastened Peter for doubting (see Matthew 14:29-31).

Let's not let the physical circumstances in the world around us or the bogus teachings of counterfeit teachers cause us to doubt or to depend on our own works. When Jesus Christ speaks of "he who overcomes" in Revelation 2 and 3, He means those who are trusting in His blood for their salvation. Thus, He means all born again Christians. Teachers who claim that we must overcome by our own efforts, or that overcoming is above and beyond the victory Christ has gained for us,

even if they say we are assisted in our overcoming by Christ, are teaching a false message and must be rejected as false apostles and deceitful workers (2 Corinthians 11:13).

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