

CHAPTER FIVE

CHARACTERISTICS OF AN OVERCOMER

Introduction

The following is a summary of the previous chapters:

1. Man was *created* for a purpose --- to have dominion with Christ in the kingdom of the heavens over the earth.

2. Man was *saved* for the same purpose — to have dominion. As part of His redemptive plan for mankind, because of His love for His creation, God the Father offered His Son as the sacrificial Lamb in order to wipe away man’s sins, to cleanse man, to offer man eternal life (salvation of the spirit), and to offer Christians an inheritance in Christ's kingdom (salvation of the soul). He left Christians the Holy Spirit as a guarantee to this offer, to guide them into all truth, so that they may be prepared with good works at the Judgment Seat of Christ. The moment one believes in the Lord Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit is made alive in his spirit, his eternal salvation is secure; and through the act of baptism, he is born again.

3. The moment one is born again, he is entered into a race of faith, in which he will be tested throughout his life. If he endures and produces good works done through the power of the Holy Spirit, his soul will be saved (salvation of the soul) at the Judgment Seat of Christ and he will rule and reign in Christ’s heavenly kingdom for one thousand years. On the other hand, if he produces works of the flesh during his lifetime, then at the Judgment Seat of Christ he will suffer loss and be cast out of the kingdom during the Millennium, a region known as “Outer Darkness.” Apostate Christians will receive a stricter judgment, being cast to the lake of fire for one thousand years. The unsaved will remain in Hades for one thousand years. Then, after the Millennium, they will be delivered to the Great White Throne Judgment where their works will inevitably cast them into the lake of fire burning with brimstone forever.

4. During the Millennium, Christ will set up His dual kingdom -- one on earth on the holy mountain in Jerusalem with the twelve tribes of Israel ruling and reigning over the nations; and one in heaven, where the bride of Christ (overcomers chosen from the Church) will rule and reign from heaven over the earth.

5. From the creation of Adam, man has been given six thousand years to dwell on the earth, be spiritually redeemed and work for their soul salvation. Pentecost marked the beginning of the third dispensation, lasting 2,000 years. At its completion, the Church will be removed to heaven and the Tribulation upon earth will begin. After seven years, Christ will return to earth to restore Israel, take down Gentile world power and begin His rule. After one thousand years, He will deliver up the kingdom to God the Father and then the Eternal Ages will begin and have no end. All Christians will now have a part in the New Jerusalem during the Eternal Ages.

6. From the creation of man until the present day, the close of six thousand years is approaching. The 7th day, the 3rd day, is very near. We are in the brink of the last days before the second return of our Lord Jesus Christ!

Realizing that the time is near when the Lord will return, what sort of person should we be? Where will we choose to spend the coming Millennium? If one chooses to overcome his life, he will have the peace of God regardless of the circumstances around him. Throughout his lifetime, various trials and tribulations may arise for the purpose of maturing his faith. But for most Christians, choosing to overcome is a road less traveled. Though Christians possess the capacity for spiritual perception, many choose to follow the soulical rather than the spiritual man. But if one endures the race of the faith he will reap its rewards on that coming Day. This is the encouragement that Paul gave the Church in Galatia:

And let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart.

(Galatians 6:9)

What does it mean to be an overcomer? The meaning of the term *to overcome* is "to conquer", "to win a victory" or "to prevail." It refers to a contest or a conflict ending in victory.

With each of the seven Churches in **Revelation** chapters **two** and **three**, God ends His letter saying, "*to him who overcomes.*" The overcomers are a separate and distinct class of Christians for whom God offers special rewards and crowns. This clearly shows that not all Christians will overcome. There are carnal and spiritual Christians, faithful and unfaithful ones, overcomers and those who are overcome by the world, the flesh and the devil. Overcoming is a life-long process and only in active obedience through faith can one overcome.

1 John 5:3-5 says this:

For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments. And His commandments are not burdensome. For whatever is born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world---our faith. Who is he who overcomes the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?

The first step in overcoming is accomplished by believing that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. Second, it is accomplished by keeping His commandments, which can only be done in obedience through faith, allowing the Spirit to work through the Christian. He who believes in His Word of the coming kingdom and the possibility of sharing it with Him and he who acts in faithful obedience to His Word, it is he who overcomes.

By keeping our hearts and minds focused on the kingdom first, we have the ability to overcome the world. Although Jesus was persecuted and crucified, He kept His focus on the kingdom of His Father, anticipating His rewards, and therefore He overcame the world. He fulfilled His Father's will and finished the work.

“These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.” (John 16:33)

“I have glorified You on the earth. I have finished the work which You have given Me to do. And now, O Father, glorify me together with Yourself, with the glory which I had with You before the world was.” (John 17:4)

A *life to overcome* means a life or soul to win; to have victory over. Another expression used is “*soul winning*.” Soul winning is *winning one’s life*. We are currently running a race to obtain victory of our soul. Because of Christ's resurrection, He was able to conquer both Death and Hades for us. Death has no power over Christians, as we are able to participate in Christ's victory. But we must also finish the work which God has given us to do in order to be awarded a glorious body as kings-priests and win our life in the age to come.

The race that Paul prepared himself for, the race that all Christians need to prepare themselves for is *the race of the faith*.

I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day (Day of the Lord--the Millennial Kingdom Age), and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing.” (2 Timothy 4:7, 8)

Like any race, the winner receives a prize. The prize that Paul strived for was for an imperishable crown in the kingdom of heaven. And like any race, not all are winners. Paul recognized that the loss of the victor's crown was a very real possibility for any believer, regardless of his or her standing in the Christian community.

But I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified. (1 Corinthians 9:27)

Paul did not assume that he would win the race. He continued to discipline his body of flesh, and to fight against adversity, rejection and spiritual warfare. This clearly shows that not all Christians will win the race into the kingdom, but only those who truly remain steadfast in the faith. Faith in Scripture means “*believing what God has said.*” Paul called it “the faith” meaning to *believe what God has said pertaining to the message of the kingdom, of the inheritance.*

We have as our greatest example of an overcomer, Jesus Christ, whom we do well to follow:

For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps.

(1 Peter 2:21)

The Book of **Hebrews** teaches Christians, during the course of their race, to keep their eyes fixed on Jesus.

Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him, endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

(Hebrews 12:1, 2)

Jesus is our perfect example and role model. He focused on the joy that was set before Him. His attention was not on the agonies of the Cross, but on the crown; not on the suffering, but on the reward. The only way to model Christ is to know Him. And the only way Christians can have knowledge of Christ is through the study of His Word. Part of the Christian race in which we are presently entered has to do with going from immaturity to maturity (maturing in the knowledge of God's Word concerning the kingdom), so that we will be able to produce good works. Such works of faithful endurance produces what we see in **1 Peter 1:9**:

...receiving the end of your faith--the salvation of your souls.

Maturing in the faith and producing good works through the Spirit is all a process and comes from reading and studying the Word of God.

So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God. (Romans 10:17)

We must set aside time to read and study God's Word. Any distraction away from the goal will invariably result in straying off the course leading toward the goal. And Jesus said that a man who could not keep his eyes fixed on the goal is not fit for the kingdom of God.

But Jesus said to him, "No one, having put his hand to the plow, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God." (Luke 9:62)

Paul knew this and therefore did not wander back and forth; he had his eyes fixed on the goal and he never looked back:

Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. (Philippians 3:13)

As a Christian, this race is not optional. The moment one is spiritually saved, he is entered into this race. If he ignores the gift of the indwelling Holy Spirit and does not abide in God's Word, then he is setting himself up for doom and failure when his race is finished.

We must realize that there is purpose in our lives. God has given each and every Christian a future purpose and goal — the heavenly inheritance. If our mindset is fixed on the things of this world, then we are living a life without a care for our inheritance. But when our

eyes are fixed on the goal of the kingdom, there we will find our true purpose and fulfillment. We can decide to get all our rewards here on earth which is short-lived, or we can choose to work for future rewards in the kingdom, that which is eternal.

Solomon drifted away from God during his lifetime, pursuing different ways to achieve temporary satisfaction. Only after many years of futile searching did he finally remember the true source of permanent fulfillment and peace: a sound relationship with God. Satisfaction can be found only in God and His purpose for us.

In the Book of **Ecclesiastes**, Solomon wrote:

So I became great and excelled more than all who were before me in Jerusalem. Also my wisdom remained with me. Whatever my eyes desired I did not keep from them. I did not withhold my heart from any pleasure, for my heart rejoiced in all my labor;

And this was my reward from all my labor. Then I looked on all the works that my hands had done, and on the labor in which I had toiled; And indeed all was vanity and grasping for the wind. There was no profit under the sun.
(Ecclesiastes 2:9-11)

*Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter:
Fear God and keep His commandments, for this is man's all.
For God will bring every work into judgment, including every secret thing, whether good or evil.*
(Ecclesiastes 12:13, 14)

In the following chapters, examples will be extracted from the Old Testament and the New Testament of believers who overcame and those who were overcome. By studying these believers of the past, we are able to determine what it takes to obtain the characteristics of an overcomer.

Now all these things happened to them as examples, and they were written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages have come." (1 Corinthians 10:11)

Let us therefore strive to achieve the salvation of our souls, keeping our focus fixed on Jesus and on the goal up ahead. And let us move on with diligence in studying the characteristics of an overcomer.