

Notes for the Ekklēsia Meeting

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Learning to Apply the Overcoming Power of Jesus Christ

by Dan Trygg

"These things I have spoken to you, so that *in Me* you may have peace. In the world you *have* tribulation (lit., 'pressure, things pressing in on you, being squeezed', affliction, or trouble), but take courage; I *have overcome* the world." John 16:33

"I am writing to you, young men, because you *have overcome* the evil one... I write to you, young men, because you are strong, and the word of God abides in you, and you *have overcome* the evil one." I John 2:13,14

"You are from God, little children, and *have overcome* them (evil spirits); because greater is He who is in you than he who is in the world." I John 4:4

"And they *overcame* him (Satan) because of the blood of the Lamb and because of the word of their testimony, and they did not love their life even to death." Revelations 12:11

"For whatever is born of God *overcomes* the world; and this is the victory that *has overcome* the world-- our faith. Who is the one who *overcomes* the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?" I John 5:4,5

"Do not *be overcome* by evil, but *overcome* evil with good." Romans 12:21

I was recently asked a question about "overcoming" in the Christian life. **What does it mean to "overcome"? Is this something I do, or something Jesus does?** Is this applicable only in one area, or on multiple fronts? **How do I experience the "overcoming" the Bible is talking about?**

Before going any further, let's define some terms. There are four different Greek word roots rendered as "overcome" in the NT. Two of them are used of being overcome by sleep. In Luke 9:32, it says Peter, James and John were "overcome with sleep". The Greek stem is from a word meaning, "weighed down by" (cf. Matt. 26:43; Lk. 21:34; II Cor. 1:8; 5:4; I Tim. 5:16). We have a similar example in Acts 20:9, where Eutychus was "overcome with sleep". The Greek is a different stem, meaning "carried down" or "carried away" by sleep (cf. Acts 25:7; 26:10). In II Peter 2:19,20, we have yet another Greek stem, which literally means "to be made less" or "made inferior" or "to be defeated by", hence to "give way to" or "yield to" (cf. II Cor. 12:13). Even though the major translations use "overcome" in their renderings, the word clearly emphasizes the losing side of a struggle or test. "By what a person is-defeated-by, by this he is enslaved", or, "to what a person gives-way-to, to this he is enslaved". This person is "less than" the temptation. He can't or doesn't stand before it. He easily succumbs to its allure.

The main word rendered as "overcome" is *nikaō*. It occurs 28 times in the NT (cf. Lk. 11:22; Rom. 3:4; Rev. 2:7,11,17,26; 3:5,12, 21 (2x); 5:5; 6:2 (2x); 11:7;12:11; 13:7; 15:2; 17:14; 21:7, in addition to the verses at the top of this page), **and means "to conquer, get victory, overpower, prevail, carry-the-day, defeat the opposition, to win, to triumph, to vanquish"**. It clearly represents having the stronger position or ability, so that the outcome of any challenge would be to overpower and defeat the opposing force. Notice that, aside from one passage in Luke, and two occurrences in Romans, every other instance is in one of the apostle John's writings. He definitely saw the Christian life as a clash between Kingdoms, a struggle against good and evil, light and darkness, God and Satan, walking according to the world-system or walking by faith. 17 of the 28 occurrences are in the book of Revelations, alone! This is a book all about conflict, the testing of the saints, and the final victory of God's Kingdom over the forces of darkness.

If you take the time to look over these verses, you will notice that **victory is spoken of as being something already accomplished, as well as something that needs to still be obtained. This can be confusing.** On the one hand, Jesus tells us that He *has overcome* the world-system (Jn 16:33), yet we are also told that we are ones who are *presently overcoming* the world (I Jn. 5:4,5). The occurrences in Revelations 2 and 3 are challenges for *present* and *future* battles. The phrase, "the one overcoming", usually followed by promises for those who succeed in doing so, is a challenge given to the people in each of the seven churches mentioned, ...and, indirectly, also to us. In I John 2:13,14 and 4:4, **it would appear that Satan and his spiritual powers are defeated, yet Revelations 12:11 describes an ongoing, present and future conflict where believers are still tested and opposed by Satan, ...even to the extent of death!** They "win the day", in that they do not compromise their faith, but they *die* in the conflict! (Hebrews 2:14 says that, through His own death, Jesus "might render powerless him who had the power of death, that is, the devil", yet people are *still* dying! Satan *has been* defeated, and rendered ineffective, yet he *still* utilizes the "power of death".) **These passages very clearly portray a conflict that is present and ongoing.**

How are we to understand this apparent discrepancy between proclaimed victory and present struggle? This is a phenomenon we experience because we live in an overlap of two ages, ...the present, evil age (Gal. 1:4), and the incursion of the Kingdom of God into this world, i.e., the "impending age" (cf. Heb. 6:5). We don't typically speak this way, so this is a foreign concept to many of us, but it is clearly taught in the scriptures. The Biblical language speaks of "ages", eons, periods of time ("forever" = lit., "unto the ages" - Lk. 1:33; Rom. 1:25; 9:5; 11:36; 16:27; II Cor. 11:31; Phil. 4:20;

I Tim. 1:17; Heb. 13:8; I Pet. 5:11; “forever” = lit., “unto the age”, referring to the end of *this* age, and the coming of the *new* age - Heb. 5:6; 6:20; 7:17,21,24,28; I Pet. 1:25; I Jn. 2:17; II Jn. 1:2; Jude 1:13; “forever and ever” = “unto the ages of the ages” - Gal. 1:5; II Tim. 4:18; Heb. 1:18; 13:21; I Pet. 4:11; Rev. 1:6, 18; 4:9,10; 5:13; 7:12; 10:6; 11:15; 14:11; 15:7; 19:3; 20:10; 22:5; “before the ages” - I Cor. 2:7; God “made the ages” - Heb. 1:2; God “fitted-out the ages” - Heb. 11:3; “the completions/ends of the ages” - the ages have a goal/purpose - I Cor. 10:11; “in the coming ages” - i.e., future ages - Eph. 2:7; “from the ages” - i.e., past ages - Eph. 3:9; Col. 1:26; “the now age” - i.e., the present age - I Tim. 6:17; II Tim. 4:10; Tit. 2:12; the “purpose of the ages” - scope of all times - Eph. 3:11; “the age of the ages” - Eph. 3:21; God is the “King of the ages” - I Tim. 1:17; “the consummation or conclusion of the ages” - Heb. 9:20; “before all the ages, and now, and unto all the ages” - Jude 1:25). **Jesus made the distinction between “this age” and “the age to come”** (Matt. 12:32). Literally, the “age to come” is the age that is “impending, on the point of, on the verge of”. In Mark 10:30, Jesus speaks of “the coming age”, but the Greek is open-ended. It is not just the “age to come” it is “the age that *is coming*”, already. **Jesus taught that the Kingdom of God was “at hand”** (Mk. 1:15), and that it had, in fact, *arrived* (Lk. 11:20), and was *in their midst* (Lk. 17:21). This was evidenced by the Kingdom power operational in His ministry. **In a similar way, the presence of the “age to come” is evidenced by the powers of the impending age**, the “...signs, wonders and various miracles, and by gifts of the Holy Spirit” (Heb. 2:4; 6:5). **The most powerful, personal indication of the presence of the coming age operating in our lives is experienced by the working of the inner life of the Holy Spirit** in those who are Christians. **John refers to this as “age-type” life** (usually translated as “*eternal* life”, it is an adjective to describe the new quality of life produced by the new birth). The point of this is that **while the new, Kingdom age is here, it is not here in its fullness. We experience aspects of it, but not the full measure.** For example, the power of sin is broken, but we still have sin in our members, and will still struggle with it. Death has been defeated, yet people still die. Jesus bore our sicknesses, and people are healed by His power, but not everyone all the time. Demons are defeated, but they still attack people. In the Kingdom, we will be like Jesus in our character, but we do not automatically experience all of that immediately, and it seems clear that we will not attain to the fullness of that until Jesus returns. Satan has been defeated, yet he is still active and has great influence. **Someone said that we live in the “already, but not yet”. We experience some aspects of the Kingdom age now, but we do not yet experience the fullness God has promised.**

That is important background to understand what the scriptures teach regarding “overcoming”. Jesus has, indeed, won the victory over sin, sickness, and Satan. He *has* provided power to experience victory in *all* these areas. **There is need to apply ourselves to understand and obtain that power.** We *will* experience victories and progress, but **we will not attain to all that the age to come promises, nor will we be free from all the negative aspects of the present, evil age, until Jesus returns.** This is not an excuse, to discourage our pressing in after what is available to us in Christ. **What should be our measuring stick? How much should we expect to receive in these areas? We can certainly expect that God wants to do the same things today that He did in the NT times.** Jesus said, “The one believing in Me, the works that *I* do, also *that person* will do, and greater works than these will do...” (Jn. 14:12). That sets the bar pretty high! **If the new Kingdom age is here, we can expect the power and works of that Kingdom to be available to us today.** God is not a vending machine, or the Cosmic Bell-hop, however. We don’t *tell* Him what to do. We *ask*. We seek His face, His counsel, ...and then we do what He shows us to do. **Even Jesus said that He did not initiate miracles or ministry from Himself. He watched to see what the Father was doing, and joined Him** (Jn. 5:19). For most of us, the battle is not to *hold back*, but to *move out* in faith. There are some, however, who need to understand that sometimes they won’t get what they want, when *they* want it.

Let’s talk a bit more about getting the victory in our experience. **The first, and most important, principle is to recognize that Jesus *did*, indeed, win the victory.** He *has* overcome or defeated the world-system, the sinful-flesh, and the devil. He *has* paid for sin, bore our sicknesses, and poured out the Holy Spirit for us. Everything we need for life and godliness *has been* provided through Jesus, and is available to us (II Pet. 1:3,4). **A second key truth is that our faith in Christ is, in itself, a great defeat for Satan.** When we trusted in Christ, we were moved out from the enemy’s legal authority (Col. 1:13). Instead of his pawn, we have now become an opponent, one who could do damage to his interests. **Third, without a vision of the possibilities available to us in Christ, we will not pursue what God has for us.** Faith is built upon hope. Hope is an awareness of what God intends for us. Faith lays hold of the promise, and moves us to pursuit. We must educate ourselves regarding what God’s will and intention is for us. **Fourth, we consciously put aside our old beliefs and self-identity, and choose to see ourselves as a man or woman who desires to live for God.** Ask for the leading and empowering of the Holy Spirit. This is an intentional act of purposing to yield to Christ as your Master. **Fifth, this decision will precipitate a new direction in your life.** This is a further, deeper level of faith, an out-and-out pursuit of the things of God. **Six, the notion of “overcoming” or “obtaining victory” implies resistance and struggle.** The resistance could be as simple as ignorance, laziness, or an unwillingness to invest in spiritual disciplines in order to grow. The struggle could be in dying to the approval of others, or in turning away from some temptation or sin pattern. Or, the resistance could come in the form of a spiritual attack, ...the introduction of evil or distracting thoughts into your mind, a flurry of distractions, or people who attack your interest in Christ. **Seventh, pressing through and persevering will bring further insights, understanding and breakthrough.** We must press through into deeper fellowship with God, and persevere in obedience to His counsel.