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"TO BE OR NOT TO BE" an "OVERCOMER"

HEALTH WARNING!

These thoughts may burn out some long held prejudices and inspire new life goals. Please persist with the treatment, seeking full immersion in the Word, until new understanding is fully assimilated. The treatment may take some time and requires effort to be effective. Success is assured if the Maker's instructions are followed.

Around 2-3 years ago the Lord drew my attention to the endings of the letters to the 7 churches in Revelation, chapters 2 & 3. Each letter ends in a similar way, "to him who overcomes," with a promise following.

Upon first discovering these, I shared them with the "Home Group" we have attended for many years. It was an interesting study, but no more. It wasn't until late this afternoon (8 October 1999), just in time to get into trouble with the wife for not setting the table in time for tea, that the Lord showed me what they really meant! But it shows His empathy too, in that He had started preparing me, several years ago, for this day. And what did He show me? That the promises He made to these 7 churches were to be fulfilled by the overcoming people of His Tabernacle Church. These promises make just so much more sense, now that the blinkers have been removed from my eyes.

Who is an Overcomer? How I have resisted that word over the years! It was even hard to type it today, although I did manage it without making a mistake! Entrenched prejudices don't disappear that easily, do they? The word, (without the "r"), is used in a positive way, almost exclusively by the Apostle John in the books of 1 John and Revelation. The Greek root of the word is "nikao", which is usually translated as "overcome/s" but sometimes interpreted as "conquer/or", overpower/s, prevailed, triumphed or victorious. So an Overcomer then is one who overcomes, who prevails, who triumphs. But over what? Let's look at Revelation 15:2.

"And I saw what looked like a sea of glass mixed with fire and, standing beside the sea, those who had been victorious over the beast and his

image and over the number of his name."

And who are these victorious ones? My Study Bible, written by far more learned people than I, tells me, "the saints victory over the devil in 12:11." Amazing how things tie in! An Overcomer then, is one who has attained maturity in Jesus Christ by working out the 3 stages of Revelation 12:11 in their life.

But what about 1 John 5:5, you may ask – if you are a real bible expert.

"Who is it that overcomes the world? Only he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God"

So we only need to believe to overcome? No! Read on a bit! The next three verses in fact. (v6-8)

" This is the one who came by water and blood – Jesus Christ. He did not come by water only, but by water and blood. And it is the Spirit who testifies, because the Spirit is the truth. For there are three that testify: the Spirit, (i.e. The Holy Spirit) the water (i.e. The Father) and the blood; (i.e. Jesus) and the 3 are in agreement.

Yes, Jesus is the vital first step, but the Spirit and the Father need to be added in too to get "the 3 that testify." An "overcomer" then, needs all three "S" experiences in God – Salvation, Spirit, and Submission to the will of the Father. It is so dangerous, taking a verse out of context!

What is the Overcomer's Job? To overcome something or someone! The real interesting question is who or what. Now the answer to this one is simple – it must be because I know it without even having to look it up! Back to Revelation 12.

(v9) "The great dragon was hurled down – that ancient serpent called the devil, or Satan, who leads the whole world astray. (v12) They overcame him (i.e. Satan) by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony; they did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death."

The Overcomer's job then is to defeat Satan! This is achieved by being completely sold out (dedicated) to Jesus. Easily said, not so easily done! For we have to overcome, to put aside, the desires of the remnant of that old human nature that still lurks within each of us.

This ultimate battle by the "fully fledged overcomers" is still in the future for the church as a whole. For we are unable as yet, to fully eliminate those last vestiges of our human nature. For no one is perfect – except my teenage kids, of course! But the pattern is set. And the degree to which we submit, will reflect the measure of God's power that we are able to harness, to defeat Satan in our living today. Unlike a worldly battle where might is right, the spiritual battle is won through submission, ultimate submission bringing ultimate victory. Hence the high place accorded to martyrs – literal submission unto death. The world cannot understand how death can mean victory, but it can and does, for that is the example that Jesus set! The more we submit, the more we are given. Not the 100% attained by the martyrs, but in varying degrees, some greater, e.g. John Wesley, some lesser – me as of yet, but I am trying! (very trying some might say!)

The Overcomer's Rewards: Kathy has just come downstairs to my office and seen this heading on my computer. "How can you talk about overcomers rewards when you haven't even believed in overcomers before?" Our spouse knows us! For the Lord has changed me! Particularly so because another of my idiosyncrasies, (or prejudices!) is against those who are motivated to action primarily by the promise of reward. In my life, the enjoyment and challenge of a task has always been of utmost importance. If rewards follow – great – if they don't, I have had a lot of fun trying anyway! These attitudes have got me into trouble at times, as I have taken excessive risks in the pursuit of my dreams. Am doing so again here too! Some people never learn! It is probably why the Lord can use me though. Because I am prepared to step out, (apply faith) in what He tells me to do. I have learned now though, to be as sure as I can, that it is the Lord speaking before moving out! That is why 'Eagles Fly High!' includes 'David's Musings', for they often contain the important, faith building, physical confirmations of the spiritual leading the Lord gives me. I need them too, to take

these risks! But back to the point! Rewards are not a great motivator to me. I am including them here because the Lord wants me too. That is why He has revealed them to me. Certainly, not to be ignored because of any personal prejudice or motivation. For He knows more than I do! Of that I am sure! I do realise that you may well be different to me and

be motivated by rewards. That is great too. For it is just as well we are all different! A world full of David clones wouldn't be too good for getting the dishes washed (getting better) or the ironing done (will never learn)! And from what I have found out so far, these promised rewards look pretty good to me too! So let's investigate together, shall we.

1. To The Church in Ephesus:

"To him who overcomes I will give the right to eat from the tree of life." (Revelation 2:7)

Talking about re-establishing the relationship that Adam and Eve had with God in the Garden of Eden before their "4F" exercise! (forbidden fruit feasting fiasco) Now we know that Jesus re-established that relationship, but only what is called "positionally", (done but not yet fully lived out by us), when he died on the cross. It has not yet been worked out, because we have not fully overcome (that word seems to keep coming up!) our natural sinful nature yet. As we do overcome that nature, by completely submitting to God's will for our lives, the promise says we will be restored to that closeness of relationship that Adam and Eve originally had with their Father God. Wouldn't that be amazing! Some individuals have come a long way towards attaining this promise and we are all being called to it. However, it will be fully attained by the overcomers. The first reward.

"But wait, there is more", to use the words of all the most successful direct marketing adverts we see on the telly! Do you want to participate?

2. To The Church in Smyrna:

"He who overcomes will not be hurt at all by the second death." (Revelation 2:11)

Two deaths? That is what it says. Death one. When we die. Easy! But death two? When all the dead, who have been raised for the final judgement, are judged.

".....The dead were judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books.The lake of fire is the second death. If anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown in the lake of fire." (Revelation 20:12,14,15)

The final judgement determines our eternal future – eternal "life" with Jesus, or eternal "death" of torment in the lake of burning sulphur. If you know the ferocity with which sulphur burns, it is not an experience to be recommended!

Death then, is linked with judgement. The interesting concept here, not understood by many Christians, is that everyone, Christians as well as non-Christians will be judged.

"For we must all appear before the judgement seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad." (2 Corinthians 5:10)

Now this was a new thought for me! I need to check this one out! How is this possible? I thought that because Jesus had died for my sins that I, as a Christian, would not be judged. Well that is obviously not correct. You are wrong again David! So what are the facts?

a. Non Christians: Will be judged on Judgement Day, which is at the end of the 1000-year reign of Christ on the earth.

"(The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were ended.)" (Revelation 20:5)

b. Christians: Are divided into 2 categories.

i. Ordinary Christians: On Judgement Day along with the non Christians.

ii. Those Who Will Reign With Christ (i.e. Overcomers and Martyrs)

"I saw thrones on which were seated those who had been given the authority to judge. (Overcomers) And I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded because of their testimony for Jesus and because of the word of God. (Martyrs).....They came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years." (Revelation 20:4)

The method of judgement of these people is quite different. For they are those who are prepared to let God work in them, to change them, during their lifetime. This is generally described as becoming mature sons in Christ. This concept of letting God work in us now, judge us now to avoid later judgement, is expressed in 1 Corinthians 11:31-32.

"But if we judged ourselves we would not come under judgement. When we are judged by the Lord, we are being disciplined so that we will not be condemned with the world."

So to be an overcomer we are required to subject ourselves to God's judgement in our lives now, to fix up all those areas that God progressively shows us are not as He desires them to be. By applying God's judgement to our life now, we will not have to face the second death, the final judgement.

Sounds great to me. Do you wish to participate?

3.To The Church in Pergamum:

To him who overcomes, I will give some of the hidden manna. I will also give him a white stone with a new name written on it, known only to him who receives it." (Revelation 2:17)

Now Jesus is starting to reveal more details of the future of this group of Overcomers. For it is as if there will be a grand graduation banquet. The white stone with a new name written on it", is a personalised invitation from Jesus to participate in His 1,000 year reign governing team.

"The nations will see your righteousness, and all kings your glory; you will be called by a new name that your Lord will bestow. You will be a crown of splendour in the Lord's hand, a royal diadem in the hand of your God." (Isaiah 62:2-3)

The new name is the name given by the victor, who is Jesus. The new name signifies a new life for us, in the purposes and anointing of God. Such was the case for Jacob when he wrestled with God's angel. (possibly Jesus)

"Then the man said, 'Your name will no longer be Jacob, but Israel, because you have struggled with God and with men and have overcome.'" (Genesis 32:28)

Funny how that word "overcome" should appear here too, back in the first book of the Old Testament! Must be a coincidence!

Then on to one of my favourite subjects – food! The hidden manna. Hidden until this time and only available to those invited to the feast.

"he rained down manna for the people to eat, he gave them the grain of heaven. Men ate the bread of angels; he sent them all the food they could eat." (Psalm 78:24-25)

Now, that is my kind of banquet – unlimited food! Only problem is that it has more affect on my girth than it used to! Still I expect that God's manna will be both delicious and non-fattening too! As with the Feast of Tabernacles itself, which we will look at later, this will be the greatest time of celebration in history.

However, this verse is really talking about 'hidden', that is spiritual manna. Hidden manna is spiritual revelation that is in God's word, the bible, but isn't obvious without God revealing it to us.

"All scripture is God-breathed....." (2 Timothy 3:16)

and God's nature is revealed through it. Just as we get to know our spouse better than we know other people (hopefully!) because we are committed to them, so as we become more committed to God, He reveals more of himself to us. If we are prepared to make the commitment to Him of being an overcomer, He promises to reveal more of Himself to us than He does to others. For example, some Christians may try to read this book and not comprehend what is being said, while others will have a greater understanding than is being revealed here. The more we seek, the more we will find. Do you want to participate?

4. To The Church in Thyatira:

"To him who overcomes and does my will to the end, I will give authority over the nations – 'He will rule them with an iron sceptre; he will dash them to pieces like pottery' – just as I have received authority from my Father. I will also give him the morning star." (Revelation 2:26-28)

a. Rule With an Iron Sceptre: The first part (sentence) of this 2-part promise reiterates a prophetic declaration in Psalm 2, speaking of Jesus, and written approximately 1000 years before his birth!

"I will proclaim the decree of the Lord: He said to me, "You are my Son; today I have become your Father. Ask of me, and I will make the nations your inheritance, the ends of the earth your possession. You will rule them with an iron sceptre; you will dash them to pieces like pottery." (Psalm 2:7-9)

Isn't it interesting and unbelievable really, that Jesus has in turn, delegated this function "to him who overcomes and does my will to the end." It is not just I making this up! That is what it really says! And confirmation? Yes! For I love confirmation, particularly in controversial areas! You may already have guessed by now where this confirmation is going to come from. Revelation, chapter 12, no less, and verse 5.

"She gave birth to a son, a male child, who will rule all the nations with an iron sceptre."

We will leave the implications of the "male child" until we look at the church as a whole. Have to leave some exciting things until later, to keep you reading! But it is quite clear that Jesus is delegating His authority to rule the nations to a group of individuals, who overcome Satan in their own lives first.

b. The Morning Star: The second part of the promise confirms the first, which is most encouraging to me too! The "morning star" is of course Jesus. He says so in Revelation 22:16.

"I, Jesus, have sent my angel to give you this testimony for the churches. I am the Root and the Offspring of David, and the bright Morning Star."

But it relates to a specific aspect of the makeup of Jesus. This is revealed in Numbers 24:17-19. In Balaam's 4th Oracle, Baalam prophesies

"I see him, but not now; I behold him but not near. A star will come out of Jacob; a sceptre will rise out of Israel.....A ruler will come out of Jacob and destroy the survivors of the city."

Both the star and the sceptre! Amazing how such, seemingly unrelated, prophecies dovetail in with each other so perfectly. But then we shouldn't be amazed, should we? God's perfect plan was conceived before our understanding of time began, and has been progressively revealed through the millenniums. This passage again confirms the authority of Jesus. And the authority of the morning star is to be given to His overcoming people. Thus the 2 promises of the verse are effectively the same, being confirmation of one another. Do you want to participate?

5. The Church in Sardis:

"He who overcomes will like them, be dressed in white. I will never blot out his name from the book of life, but will acknowledge his name before my "Father and his angels. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches." (Revelation 3:5)

A 3 part promise.

a. Dressed in White: Confirming that the overcomers will take their place alongside the martyrs, the "them" being referred to here.

"Then each of them was given a white robe, and they were told to wait a little longer until the number of their fellow servants and brothers who were to be killed as they had been was completed." (Revelation 6:11)

This firstly acknowledges the special place of the martyrs in God's order. It is not saying however that all overcomers have to literally be martyred, for which I am very grateful! But it is saying that all overcomers have to do the spiritual equivalent of being martyred, that is, we have to die to self. Can't win them all! For my experience is that, there is no easy ride in God, for those who want the best He has to offer. Salvation is free, but obedience costs everything. But as we see here, the rewards far outweigh the cost, for those who are sold out to God.

b. Book of Life: A controversial statement to Calvinists, who believe that once you are saved, you cannot fall out of God's grace. A reassuring one though to the overcomer, that God is on your side and looking after you.

c. Before My Father: This is the most exciting promise to date! Yes, the overcomer, by virtue(!) (get the pun!) of their white robe, will be pure enough to enter the very presence of God and His angels! Don't believe me (I trust you will check me out anyway), but do believe God! Your white robe is your admission ticket into the throne room of God and His angels. Let's look at some highlights from Revelation 7:9-15.

"After this I looked and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands. And they cried out in a loud voice: "Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb." All the angels were standing around the throne(v13) Then one of the elders asked me, "These in white robes – who are they and where did they come from?" And he said, these are those who have come out of the great tribulation; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. Therefore, " they are before the throne of God....."

So, let's look at what these verses reveal about the overcomers.

1. Who? Yes, many people (for overcomers are not to be an exclusive few) from all over the world, and yes, from all churches too! That will upset some who "know" they are the only ones with the truth! Know the sort? Not you or me – of course?
2. Where are they? In the presence of God and his angels, as in the promise.
3. Where do they come from? Out of the great tribulation promised for end times.
4. Sinless? The overcomer is sinless because of the full cleansing of the blood of Jesus in their life. Impossible? Now, yes. But we are to prepare for the day when the impossible will become reality!

See how it all fits together. I didn't realise it until now either! The Holy Spirit pressed down the computer keys through my fingers! I must have had a little to do with it though, as I have had to correct my typing errors! I have got so excited about all this that I have temporarily swapped my snails pace touch typing, for my, still the faster, "look at the keys" method! My touch-typing will improve one day, just as I trust my spiritual walk will too! But back to the point. Do you want to participate?

6. The Church in Philadelphia:

"Him who overcomes I will make a pillar in the temple of my God. Never again will he leave it. I will write on him the name of my God and the name of the city of my God, the New Jerusalem, which is coming down out of heaven from my God; and I will also write on him my new name." (Revelation 3:12)

There is a human saying "that 'Joe Bloggs' is a pillar of society." For a pillar is a sign of strength, isn't it? The same Greek word for pillars, "stylos", that was used here,

was also used by Paul to describe "Peter and John, those reputed to be pillars....." of the church, in Galatians 2:9. But in God's scheme of things, a pillar has even more significance. For pillars of cloud by day and fire by night led and guided the people of Israel during their 40 years of wandering in the desert. The Holy Spirit was their guide. In Moses Tabernacle there were 5 pillars, or posts, (hence our saying, from pillar to post), at the entrance to each section – the Outer Court, the Holy Place and the Holy of Holies. In Solomon's Temple there were 2 pillars at the entrance to the temple itself, to the Holy Place. One was called Boaz (symbolic of Jesus, as we will see later – please believe me for now!), the other Jakin, meaning 'he will establish in resurrection life.' A prediction of what Jesus would do many centuries later. Pillars therefore, represented not only support and stability, but also guidance, example and entry. For pillars showed people the entranceway to the dwelling place of God in both Moses Tabernacle and Solomon's Temple. The pillars of fire and cloud led the Jews towards their inheritance in God, towards the Promised Land of Israel.

Moses Tabernacle was of course temporary, being taken from place to place, designed to last only until the temple was built. This represents then, the life of Christ in our mortal human bodies (my body felt very temporary this morning, but has improved during the day!). Solomon's Temple (God's really!) was truly magnificent, and was a symbol of the fullness of moving into the eternal realm, where the life of Christ will live in our eternal bodies. Won't that be wonderful!

Are you starting to see a pattern in this? I am as I write! It is scary, typing away not knowing what is going to come out next! The slowness of the typing does give me more time to think though! Every cloud has a silver lining! (Bad pun – think about it!) For the overcomers are to be examples whose lives will attract others, showing people the way to salvation and fulfilment in the Lord. To be living examples of Jesus. My Auntie Ina was like that in many ways. Maybe someone you know too?

But even more exciting is that the overcomer will herald, will be a living "movie trailer" for the biggest, most spectacular blockbuster of all time, (no special effects needed!), the New Jerusalem that will accompany Jesus upon His return. A hard film to preview! How do you get that glory across before it happens? But the promise is that the overcomers will be able to do it! For they will be living temples of the light of the glory of God. Since the death of Jesus, God's earthly presence is not confined to a building but lives in, and should, and will in the case of the overcomers, shine out, of each one of us. Revelation 21:22-23 tells us about it.

starting to see a pattern in this? I am as I write too! It is scary, "I did not see a temple in the city, because the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple. The city does not need the sun or the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and the Lamb is its lamp."

The overcomers are not the full glory, but a tempting morsel to titillate the palate for the feast to come.

Now I do appreciate that some of this may be difficult to grasp initially. But please stick with it. As we proceed, the jigsaw pieces will start to fall into place. For that is the way I find things in God. Not all is revealed at once, but only as I have the ability to comprehend. Takes a long time sometimes. For I can assure you – we are both learning together! I trust though, that you still want to participate.

7.The Church in Laodicea:

"To him who overcomes, I will give the right to sit with me on my throne, just as I overcame and sat down with my Father on his throne." (Revelation 3:21)

This has to be the greatest promise for a Christian to aspire to in the whole bible. And do you know to whom it was given? The church in Laodicea. The only one of the 7 churches that Jesus had nothing good to say about! Do you recognise this church? Neither hot, nor cold? Rich, having acquired wealth, and not needing a thing? Sounds like the modern Western church to me! How about you? Yet this church was promised the greatest of all God's blessings if it mended its ungodly ways. Prophetic? You need to decide.

How to go about this mending? The answers are right there in verses 18-20. "I counsel you to buy from me gold refined in the fire, (trial and testing, typical of Pentecost)

so you can become rich; and white clothes to wear, (this couldn't, by any amazing coincidence, be referring to Tabernacles, could it?) so you can cover your shameful nakedness; (wouldn't be talking about the restoration of mankind's relationship with God lost when Adam and Eve sinned and realised they were naked, would it?) and salve to put on your eyes, so you can see. (the very glory of your God) Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline. (I thought I was the only one! Surely it doesn't happen to you too!) So be earnest and repent. (made possible by the sacrifice of Jesus, the "Passover Lamb") Here I am! (Jesus) I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me. This last verse is for Christians, not the non-Christians to whom it is normally quoted!

"I STAND AT THE DOOR AND KNOCK" is the message of Jesus to TODAY'S BELIEVERS! Are we going to heed it! For that is what entering Tabernacles is all about! Fully opening the door, fully committing our lives to Him. Being 100% sold out to God!

And where will it take us? Right into the very throne room of God! As Jesus overcame and sat down with His Father, so the ultimate promise is, if we overcome, we can become fully fledged brothers (genderless) of Jesus, fully reconciled to God the Father through the guidance and power of the Holy Spirit. Can you accept that? Surely it is not possible, David! Yes it is. Once again don't believe me, believe the word of God!

"Both the one who makes men holy and those who are made holy are of the one family. So Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers. (Hebrews 2:11)

The qualification is "holiness". And who is holy? Those who qualify to put on the "white clothes or robes", that have featured so frequently throughout these promises. Those who are prepared to love not "their lives so much as to shrink from death." (Revelation 12:11) Isn't it amazing how everything fits together so neatly. Even I didn't know until we got here! Isn't God amazing? Do you still want to participate?

Has Anyone Become an Overcomer Yet? Well there is both good and bad news here! The good news is "yes", but it is rapidly followed by the bad! For to have attained this complete oneness on earth with God up to the present time, it has been necessary to become a "martyr" for our Christian beliefs. To put it bluntly, to be killed for them! But as we will see as we proceed, this is not always going to be the case. Of course this oneness cannot be attained purely by our natural efforts, because we all still have, at least a little of our human nature left in us. But what we can do, is prepare ourselves for the day when the Lord is going to choose those whose hearts are fully committed to Him. Not just in theory but in practice too, turning them into the overcomers in whom these promises can be fulfilled. Wouldn't it be wonderful to inherit all these promises to the seven churches? Impossible? If that were the case the God I know, would not have given them to us. For He does not lie, nor does He make promises that he will not fulfil. I trust that your experience of Him is the same too! So there has to be a time of fulfilment of these promises in the natural.

As we have discussed earlier, God will not move in the "church", His "world wide" body of believers, until individual "Christians" are prepared. That is how it has been throughout the ages, and there is no reason to believe that God will change His pattern now. So the answer lies not in the soil, not in hope, but in each one of us. The sooner we are ready, the sooner God will move to fulfil the glorious destiny of His church. It couldn't be simpler in theory! A little more difficult in practice though! But it can and will be done! Praise the Lord!