

He Who Overcomes

Overcoming Trials

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When most of us were called, we were attracted by the dire warnings of the end time events that were on the horizon. We heard Mr. Armstrong speak and certainly we did not want to go through that tribulation. We realized that Mr. Armstrong stated that we were the Philadelphia church era and they would not go through the tribulation. That was a group that was to be kept from the hour of temptation that came on the whole world. We wanted to be part of that group.

And of course we wanted to please God, but we felt the duration of our time and this physical life would be relatively short. I know one good friend of mine said, "All I have to do is wait for Mr. Armstrong to say, 'Go', and that's it." We all felt that it was going to be short, but God knew that we were not really prepared or really ready. We had not been tested and tried in so many ways and He knew the Laodicean age was coming upon us where we would be tempted to let down. God wanted to see what we were made of and, I am sure, that God wanted us to see what we were made of as well.

So God allowed Mr. Armstrong to die and He caused the church to fragment into many groups. From the numbers we had in the past to the numbers we have today it would seem that many left attending church all together and have gone off on tangents, while the major groups are suffering the struggles that come with problems inherent when a church such as the Worldwide Church of God splits apart.

Those who were serious about their calling realized that they were not in this only if we go to a place of safety next year, or only if we get the work done. The realization has dawned on them that though they may have signed on with the Worldwide Church of God, or though they may have answered the calling that God gave them with the understanding that the work would be over quickly and they would be in a place of safety, have now come to the realization, the understanding, that they are in this for the long haul, whatever the long haul is.

The apostle Paul had a similar realization come upon him as life progressed. If you will turn over to I Thessalonians 4, please.

I Thessalonians 4:13-17 But I do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning those who have fallen asleep, lest you sorrow as others who have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who sleep in Jesus. For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord will by no means precede those who are asleep. For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. [And then Paul says] Then we [meaning that he considered himself, that he was going to be alive] who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air.

So here you see the apostle Paul at the time he lived felt as if he was going to be caught up in the clouds when Christ returned. Turn over to II Timothy 4 because Paul changed his mind. The time came to him that he finally realized this was not to be.

II Timothy 4:2-6 Preach the word [he is talking to Timothy]! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, will heap up for themselves teachers; and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables. But you be watchful in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry. For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure is at hand.

Somewhere in the years between I Thessalonians 4 and II Timothy 4 Paul came to understand that he was not going to still be living at the return of Jesus Christ. But this did not stop Paul. He did not let down.

Now I am not saying here that the end is a long way off and I am not saying that we are not going to a place of safety. I am not saying that we are not going to live to we see the return of Jesus Christ and I am not saying that we will not inherit eternal life. What I am saying is it is not profitable to focus on these things as being as important as we thought of them in the past. God has either delayed time, or has known all along that we needed more time to prepare and to grow and to do what He wants. I am not saying that we should not be fervent in praying for the Kingdom of God to come because indeed He commands for us to do just that every day in our prayers. "Your will be done. Your kingdom come."

But I know that each one of us groan for the Kingdom to come, and the atrocities, the perversions, the hate, the lying, the stealing, the fear, the intimidation, the prejudice, and all the senseless killings in the world to stop. Our heart is there. Brethren, God does not want us to stop sighing and crying for the world around us, but what He does want is for us to make the most valuable use of the time that He has given us and overcome.

Brethren, who is going to inherit? Who will be part of the firstfruits? Who will be among the one hundred and forty four thousand? Who will be made kings and priests? Turn over to Revelation 2. We'll just go right through these very quickly.

Revelation 2:7 "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes I will give to eat from the tree of life, which is in the midst of the Paradise of God."

Revelation 2:11 "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. He who overcomes will not be hurt by the second death."

Revelation 2:17 "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes I will give some of the hidden manna to eat. And I will give him a white stone, and on the stone a new name written which no one knows except him who receives it."

Revelation 2:26 "And he who overcomes, and keeps My works until the end, to him I will give power over the nations."

Revelation 3:5 "He who overcomes shall be clothed in white garments, and I will not blot out his name out of the Book of Life; but I will confess his name before My Father and before his angels."

Revelation 3:12 "He who overcomes, I will make a pillar in the temple of My God, and he shall go out 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 I will write on him My new name."

Revelation 3:21 "To him who overcomes I will grant to sit with Me on My throne, even as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne."

Brethren, overcoming what? To put this in a synopsis for you: he who recaptures his first love, he who stands fast through trial and tribulation, those who repent of wrong actions and thoughts, those whose hearts God searches and finds clean, those who have right works before God, those who persevere in keeping God's commandments, and those who are poor in spirit and have need of everything—these are the people that God is going to be looking for. This is the overcoming that He wants from us.

Now the word *overcome*, I think you will recognize it here, is *nikao* and it is taken from a word that you all know, *nike*. In fact, you wear them on your feet—Nike shoes. And that means *victory*. And the word *nikao* means to be victorious, to prevail.

I would like to spend a few minutes looking at the word *overcome* in various applications so we get a better picture of what God is after.

Revelation 5:1-5 And I saw in the right hand of Him that sat on the throne a scroll written inside and on the back, sealed with seven seals. Then I saw a strong angel proclaiming with a loud voice, "Who is worthy to open the scroll and to loose its seals?" And no one in heaven or on the earth or under the earth was able to open the scroll, or to look at it. So I wept much, because no one was found worthy to open and read the scroll, or to look at it. But one of the elders said to me, "Do not weep. Behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has prevailed to open the scroll and to loose its seven seals."

The word *prevail* is *overcome*. What it is here is saying here is, "Don't weep. There's no occasion for tears. The Lion of Judah has prevailed, has overcome. He has acquired this power to open the scroll through struggle and conflict and coming through the conflict as a victor, as being victorious, one who is a conqueror, who has subdued His enemy." And the sense of it was because of His overcoming that He was given the power to open the book. This was the result of conflict with evil, with evil powers, and His overcoming these powers and being victorious. So we see here that to prevail is another meaning for overcoming.

Let us look back at Romans 3. We'll start to branch out of this a bit.

Romans 3:3-4 For what if some did not believe? Will their unbelief make the faithfulness of God without effect? Certainly not! Indeed, let God be true but every man a liar. As it is written, "That You might be justified in Your words, and may overcome when You are judged."

Another way to put that is, "that you might overcome when you enter in to judgment." Now he is quoting Psalm 51 which we will turn in a few minutes. He is telling them to have the attitude of David, to be humble and to allow God to make judgment here, but in this case the word *overcome*

was sometimes used in legal matters or with trials through courts. He that was accused or acquitted might be referred to as "one who overcame," or, "to have gained his cause." An expression is used this way here as if it were a trial between David and God, and God would overcome. He would be esteemed pure and righteous in His judgment, and His sentence would be correct in condemning the crime of David.

Now we get a better idea of what overcome is when we look back in Psalm 51 and look at the words in the Old Testament. So if you will turn there, we will see what this word is.

Psalm 51:4 Against You, You only, have I sinned, and done this evil in Your sight—that You may be found just when You speak, and blameless when You judge.

Now this word *clear* can be translated as *pure, clean, bright*. In the *Theological Word Book of the Old Testament* we find that this word is *zakah*. It means to be bright, clear, and pure. It was used of olive oil and incense, and in the Psalms and Proverbs it was used metaphorically as one's nature being clear or clean. And in the *Pentateuch* it was used for the olive oil that went into the lamps. It had to be filtered, strained, and pure. This is another aspect of overcoming.

Let us take a quick look in Proverbs 16:2 and we will see some of the uses for it here.

Proverbs 16:2 All the ways of a man are pure [that is the word, the same word that has been used for overcome] in his own eyes, but the Lord weighs the spirits.

We will take another look here.

Proverbs 20:11 Even a child is known by his deeds, whether what he does is pure [or clean or filtered or strained, whether he has overcome] and right.

And for the final one,

Proverbs 21:8 The way of a guilty man is perverse; but as for the pure [or those who have overcome], his work is right.

So far we see that *overcome* would mean to be victorious, to prevail. Now we see it takes on the connotation of being pure and clean and, in a sense, filtered of all impurities. We can add a little bit more to our understanding by turning over to Luke 11.

Luke 11:22 "But when a stronger than he comes upon him and overcome him, he takes from him all his armor in which he trusted, and divides his spoils."

Here this word *overcome* is applied in a different way and it would read something like this: "But when a stronger than he shall come upon him, and conquer and subdue him, he takes from him all his armor wherein he trusted." For the last example of this,

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

Again when we apply this, it would read like this: "Be not conquered and subdued by evil, but conquer and subdue evil by good." Now we see a little bit broader application of the word. So we put it all together now and this is what it comes up with as far as overcoming comes. We now add the

word *conquer* which means, as it pertains to us, *to overcome by mental or moral force and subdue*. And then we add *subdue* which means *to gain dominion over as by war, or force, or to subjugate, or to vanquish, to repress emotions and wrong impulses*. And then to *subdue* we add *prevail*, which means *to gain mastery, to triumph, to succeed*. And then we couple that with *victorious* which means *having crushed the enemy, having won the struggle or contest, and by that having become the victor*. This gives us a pretty good understanding of what God expects when He tells us to overcome.

To accomplish this overcoming we have to have a purity that only comes from being obedient to God. This obedience to God comes from rightly judging right from wrong and having the character to do the right and to avoid the wrong.

Now what does God expect of us? Turn over to Hebrews 5. For those who have been in the church a long time, I think it is good to review this.

Hebrews 5:12 For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the first principles of the oracles of God; and you have come to need milk and not solid food.

What he was saying to us is this applies to all of us. We should have all become teachers, and by this he does not mean preachers. He means that we all should have become teachers in the way we conduct our lives, the way we raise our children, the way we live in our homes, teaches enough to explain what we believe, and to be ready to give an answer to anybody who asks for the hope that lies within us. He said we should be this by now. We should not have to go back and have the basic milk again.

Hebrews 5:13 For everyone who partakes only of milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness; for he is a babe.

He said we have been in the church for a long time. Each one of us should be well past this.

Hebrews 5:14 But solid food belongs to those who are of full age, that is, those who by reason of use [practice] have their senses exercised [or trained] to discern both good and evil.

He said solid food belongs to those who are mature, and so it is with the higher doctrines of God. He said this is what we should be doing right now—concerned with the higher doctrines of God. They are understood by those who diligently push forward. And the ones who are full of age or complete by reason of use (it means by applying it in our lives because of habit or routine or practice) have been shown the deeper meanings. The more effort we put forward, the more we learn as to what the will of God is and what He is doing. By asking or by taking of the spiritual food over a long period of time we are able to distinguish good from bad.

He will use the analogy here of food. What he is saying is an executive chef is somebody who dines in the better restaurants and cultivates a palate. He cultivates his taste buds so that he can discern a good meal from a bad meal. He can discern a good wine from a bad wine. He has cultivated that.

He goes on to say that it is habitually working to be obedient to God, and by studying and growing and understanding that we have our senses sharpened that we might discern the wonderful principles contained in God's laws and that we might truly come to see the awesome value of the mind of God, and that we might be able to discern the true from the false, and reject the false and live the truth.

In fact, Solomon knew this principle because when God asked Solomon what he wanted, Solomon did not ask for riches. He did not ask for the necks of his enemies. He said, "Give me understanding." And if you notice, God really appreciated that and He gave Solomon far more than understanding.

Hebrews 6:1 Therefore leaving the discussion of the elementary principles of Christ, let us go on to perfection, not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God.

So what he is saying here is since we have been in the church so long we should be able to comprehend a higher intent of what God is doing, and we should be striving toward those goals to reach them leaving the principles of the beginnings of Christ, leaving the principles of the beginning of a Christian individual, and we should be going forward. In other words, we are not to linger on the basics any longer. We are not to forget the basics but we are not to linger with the basics and go on to higher accomplishments

We have been in the church a long time, a lot of us, and we are supposed to go on if we are to progress into higher accomplishments. We should strive to understand all God wants from us and we are to apply these principles in the way we raise our children, the way we have our marriages, the homes that we keep, the way that we work, and every aspect of our life. We should be working to do all these things that God gives us in a right way before God. That is what God wants from us.

Well there is a warning here as well, and even though it is not stated, the warning goes something like this: If we don't use it, we're going to lose it. If we do not advance, we are probably going to go backwards. In other words, we are to *go on* to perfection, and that means that we are to be complete, we are to be a completer, a perfecter, or a consummator, and we are to be one who reaches the goal that has been set beforehand as to win the prize, and one who is to follow the examples of his Master who also overcame. This is the sense of what he is talking about here.

Hebrews 12:2 Looking unto Jesus, the 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.

This is from Zodhiates, *The Complete Word Study Dictionary* and the word *perfecter* (finisher) means *perfect; one who reaches a goal; perfection; or perfectness* stressing the realization of an end in view, the state achieved when a goal has been accomplished. This is the area we are to go toward—perfectness of God.

Now we are to always remember the basics of our Christian calling, but now in this interim time that God has given us, this time between now and the end of the age, God wants us to pull out all the stops and to go forward, to do the very best we can to overcome, to complete the perfection that God has set for us to accomplish.

Brethren, we have all come out of the world and to one degree or another we still have to overcome the world. In broad strokes we have to overcome and subdue and prevail and be victorious, all that John tells us about in I John 2:15. Let us turn over there.

I John 2:15 Do not love the world, or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him.

Now certainly John is not telling us not to love the physical creation with the streams and the oceans and the mountains. What he is referring to here is that we are not to love the way man lives and acts apart from God. His instruction to us is to not seek the things of the world as a way of life. He says we are not to live as the world does, act as the world does, think as the world does, but we are to put that behind us and we are to act and think with the mind of God directing us. This is the calling we have been given. We are to let God's mind direct us and lead us.

God through John makes it clear for everyone to understand. He says if we love this system, this way of thinking, this way of living, then the love of the Father is not in us. He makes that perfectly clear. This is part of the overcoming. And then John goes on to show us the sum and substance of what this world lives for. I am going to read *Barnes' Notes* on this.

For all that is in the world, that is, all that really constitutes the world or that enters into the aims and purposes of those who live for this life, all that the community lives for may be comprised under the following things.

I John 2:16 For all that is in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—is not of the Father but is of the world.

What he is saying here is simply, this is what the world community lives for. This is what their purpose exists for—to acquire these three things. And then simply the desire of the life would be general desires, desire for this, desire for whatever it might be, the lust of the eyes, that which is to gratify the sight in a worldly fashion. And the pride of life is ostentatiousness, arrogance, things of this nature, bragging, pride, that type of thing.

And then John goes on to show the value of all this in his statement in verse 17,

I John 2:17 And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever.

And he shows the value of it by saying it is all going to pass away. He is giving the incentive to us to reject the world realizing that all the things that the world pushes for and tries for are going to pass away. Then he shows us what has true value when he says, "but he who does the will of God [he that overcomes] lives forever." That has got to be a real incentive to overcome.

Doing the will of God is what is going to bring us happiness. Doing the will of God will give us rich, full lives and teach us and train us that we might be of use in the Kingdom of God. Doing the will of God gives us a relationship with Jesus Christ and God the Father that all of us want to have.

In broad strokes, we see what we fight: the lust of the eyes, the lust of the flesh, and the pride of life. When it comes down to reality, we fight a lot more. We fight substance abuse, and all these things

affect us in the church, alcohol, drugs, and smoking. We fight inordinate sexual lusts. We fight rebellious attitudes toward change in overcoming. We are disobedient. We have disobedient attitudes toward the roles we play as husbands, wives, mothers, fathers, and children. We fight being lazy in study and prayer. We fight a lack of love and concern for others. We fight that we disregard God's laws. We disregard man's laws. We sometimes become lawless.

We do not forgive, and we harbor anger in the church. We even lie and cheat sometimes. We are stubborn and hard-headed. All of these things belong to us in the church. I am not saying that we are all sinning and we are all terrible, but being that we have come out of the world, these things are still upon us and we fight these things. We are affected by the world we live in and we are affected by the weakness of our own nature.

I would like to turn back to Jeremiah 17 because this is the source of the problem. I know you all know this verse.

Jeremiah 17:9-10 The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; who can know it? I, the Lord, search the heart, I test the mind, even to give every man according to his ways, and according to the fruit of his doings.

So God is saying that He looks at us and He sees what is going on in us. But He also tells us that our heart is deceitful above all things, and I can vouch for that having looked at my own heart. Adam Clarke had probably the best description of the heart because it ties into what we just read in I John. He said:

The heart is supplanting, it's tortuous, it's full of windings, it's insidious, lying . . . , striving to avail itself of every favorable circumstance to gratify its propensities to pride, ambition, evil desire, and corruption of all types.

This is what our heart is. It is what my heart has been. I have to assume your heart has been the same way. It is deeply wicked, wretched, feeble, distressed beyond all things, and the hard part about the heart is it is so wicked that it even hides itself from itself. We do not even know how bad it really is.

And so a heart that is not under control, as it pertains to us, leaves itself wide open for Satan and Satan loves a heart that is not under control. Therefore, this is where the overcoming must take place—in our minds and in our hearts, the center of our being. This is where my fight has always been. I have not always done a great job because my heart will justify whatever I want to do and it will just tell me I am alright, and it does not work. It will try and justify whatever my mind comes up with and I cannot let it do that.

Why is it so difficult to make the changes that we need to make in our lives? It is the same principle that is in Hebrews 5:14 except from a carnal viewpoint. Verse 14 of Hebrews 5, which we just read, said, for those who by reason of use, or practice, have their senses exercised and trained to continue in that way.

Our senses have been exercised and trained to live as we have been living all of our lives, with the same habits, the same prejudices, the same attitudes, the same hatreds, and God says, "You're going to have to change that." We tend to continue in the direction we are used to.

I talked to Jack Bulharowski and I said, "Jack, would you please give me Newton's first law of motion." I did not ask him for it by title, but he told me what it was. And the law reads something like this: A body at rest tends to remain at rest; and a body in motion tends to remain in motion, unless acted upon by an outside force.

What we are saying here is the way you lived in the past is probably the way you will tend to live now. You will tend to hang on to all these attitudes that you had in the past, and they will still be in your Christian life, and God is saying that you have to change. We know from Philippians 1:6, Jesus Christ said, "I've started working on you and I'm going to finish it."

Well, we have a part in this too. We have a large part as far as we are concerned because it applies to our mind. We have to exert the mental outside force to cause the change to take place. That is our job. We have to get serious about our calling brethren. We have to make a rock hard decision to change some of these things that we carry with us that plague us.

Now we can continue on without changing if we would like to. We can keep on living with the same problems, and suffering the same pain, and causing the same pain to others, or we can set our mind to overcome and obey God.

Now overcoming is not a collective thing. This is not something we do as a church. It is something we do as an individual. We as individuals are always to do the right thing, despite what those around us do. If we are in a situation of marriage, then the husband or the wife should perform their part before God, as a husband or wife should, independent of what the other mate does. This goes back to I Corinthians 7 where you by your example to the unconverted mate just might win that mate over. It is the same thing here.

We are to do our part individually. It means if you are on the job you work as if you are working for Jesus Christ despite what the other employees do, whether they laugh at you, or say you are trying to "kiss up" to the boss. And if you are in a group of negative people, you are to be positive because you have the Kingdom of God in front of you and what a wonderful, positive, uplifting thing that is.

It is easy to stand up here and say, "All of you overcome and repent," and I will probably say that later, but perhaps a more helpful message would be to help all of us consider the motivation we should have to overcome. It is the motivation we need to have. We will not turn to Revelation 2 now but one of the things that Jesus Christ told the Ephesian church (the church at Ephesus) was recapture your first love.

I do not know if you remember what your first love was like, but I can remember what mine was like. We came into the church and everyone we looked at was perfect, every single person. We did not know they had the same problems we did. Whatever the minister said, we tried to do. When it came to tithing, three tithes, wow! That was something. John Ritenbaugh came in with a lot of bills that he had to pay, yet he cut down the payments on his bills to obey God in tithing. That is how our heart was. That is how the first love was.

God said to take off for the Feast; we took off for the Feast, even if we lost jobs. I know part of the problem I had was if I have to keep the Sabbath, what will my neighbors think. See at that time, my heart was very tender. I said, "Well I have to care what God thinks."

But over the years we can get some calluses on our hearts and we can say, "Well, I really can't afford to obey God in these situation. I'm sure He'll understand." And of course the answer is He will understand. But if we say we love God then we can be convicted by turning to John 14. One sentence is all it is. And that sentence convicts me certainly, and probably you too.

John 14:15 "If you love Me, keep My commandments."

What He is saying here is do not show your love by grief at My departure. Do not just profess your love, but by obedience, show Me your love. Keeping My commandments is the proper evidence (and I will be using that world evidence later on) of your love for Me. Professing it is not proof of your love, but that love that leads you to do all I command to love each other, to overcome in spite of all obstacles, shows Me that you have love for Me. This is the bottom line for us. We say that we love God. God says prove it.

This deep respect, this awe, this reverential fear of God should be the true motivation for each one of us to overcome. Turn over to I John 2, please. We'll read verses 1-6.

I John 2:1-6 My little children, these things write I to you, so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. And He Himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world. Now by this we know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments. He who says, "I know Him," and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him. [This is either fish or cut bait.] But whoever keeps His word, truly the love of God is perfected in him. By know we that we are in Him. He who says he abides in Him ought himself also to walk just as He walked.

I want to read you *Barnes' Notes* on this because it is really good.

But he who keeps His word [that is, what He has spoken, what He has commanded in the church, and the term *word* here means *everything that pertains to living a godly life*, not just the Ten Commandments per se but every aspect], in him truly is the love of God perfected. He professes to have the love of God in his heart and that love receives its completion or filling up by obedience to the will of God. That obedience is the proper carrying out or the exponent of that love which exists in the heart. To love the Savior would be defective without obedience. If this being the true interpretation then the passage does not make any affirmation about sinless perfection, but it only affirms that if true love exists in the heart, it will be carried out in the life, or that love and obedience are parts of the same thing, that the one will be manifested by the other, and that where obedience exists, it is the completion or perfecting of love.

That spells it right out. We say we love him, we have to obey. The apostle does not say here that either love or obedience would be in themselves absolutely perfect, but he says that one cannot fully develop without the other. I will read I John 5:1-5 from the New English Bible.

Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ is a child of God, and to love the parent means to love the child. It follows that when we love God and obey His commands, we love His children too. [The children too means the brethren, husbands, and the wives. It means the entire Family of God.] For to love God is to keep His commands and they are not burdensome because every child of God is a victor over this godless world, and the

victory that defeats the world is our faith. For who is victor over the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God [and I added here, because of that belief] obeys Him.

Based on this I would like to make a statement here. It could be stated that the greater the love we have for God, the greater our obedience will be, and the greater our obedience will be, the greater our repentance will be from wrong deeds. And the greater our obedience, the greater the forgiveness will be extended to us.

We are going to go through a parable in Luke.

Luke 7:36 Then one of the Pharisees [we find out later that it is Simon] asked Him to eat with him. And He went into the Pharisee's house, and sat down to eat.

This was a situation during that time that, of course, they did not sit down to eat like we do. They laid out on one side, so Jesus' feet were extended out behind Him there. It was also a custom that when any great visitor came into somebody's house, that the entire town, or those who were interested, could come in and watch the proceedings and just listen to what was taking place. It is not like we have it today. So here the situation was He came in, He reclined on the couch, and He was talking to Simon as we will see here.

Luke 7:37 And, behold, a woman in the city who was a sinner, when she knew that Jesus sat at the table in the Pharisee's house, brought an alabaster box of fragrant oil.

So here she heard this and she came in and she was a sinner. We do not know exactly what her sins were. Maybe she was a prostitute. It just does not say. But evidently her sins were great.

Luke 7:38-39 And stood at His feet behind Him [because He was reclining] weeping; and she began to wash His feet with tears, and wiped them with the hair of her head; and she kissed His feet, and anointed them with the fragrant oil [or with precious ointment]. Now when the Pharisee who had invited him saw this, he spoke within himself [he was pompous and stuck up], saying, "This man, if He were a prophet [if He really knew what the score was], would know who and what manner of woman this is who is touching Him, for she is a sinner."

He was sitting there in judgment. Now of course Jesus Christ knew what was on his mind.

Luke 7:40-47 And Jesus answered and said to him, "Simon, I have something to say to you." [Jesus Christ was setting a trap there. He was going to teach a lesson and convict the Pharisee.]. And he [the Pharisee] said, "Teacher, say it." [Jesus said] "There was a certain creditor who had two debtors. The one owed five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. And when they had nothing with which to pay, he freely forgave them both. Tell Me, therefore, which of them will love him more?" [Now of course Jesus Christ was referring to the woman here with the five hundred denarii, and the Pharisee with the fifty. And Simon walked right into it. He thought about it. He was a very bright man.] Simon answered and said, "I suppose the one whom he forgave more." And He said to him, "You have rightly judged." [Then he proceeds to correct Simon.] And He turned to the woman, and said to Simon, "Do you see this woman? I entered into your house, you gave Me no water for My feet, but she has washed My feet with tears and wiped them

with the hair of her head. You gave Me no kiss, but this woman has not ceased to kiss My feet since the time I came in. You did not anoint My head with oil, but this woman has anointed My feet with fragrant oil. [Here it comes in verse 47.] Therefore I say to you, her sins, which are many, are forgiven, for she loved much. But to whom little is forgiven, the same loves little."

Now here is the principle on this. "Therefore I say to you Simon, she has done this, she has evidence that her sins have been forgiven by the love she shows Me. Her conduct, the way she is now living, shows that her sins have been forgiven." This verse is not showing that her sins were forgiven because she loved Jesus Christ. This verse is showing that she loved Jesus Christ because her sins were forgiven.

The love of God always follows the forgiveness of our sins. It does not precede it, and she was exceedingly thankful and exceedingly grateful. Albert Barnes covered this, too, and it was very well done. He said:

The meaning of this may be thus expressed: Simon, her sins so many and so aggravated have been forgiven as she is no longer such a sinner as you suppose, is made evident by her conduct, by how she's living. She shows deep gratitude, penitence, and love. Her conduct is the proper expression of that love, while you Simon have shown comparatively little evidence that you thought your sins were great and comparatively little love at their being forgiven. She has shown she felt hers to be great and therefore has loved much at the forgiveness of her sins.

He who feels that little has been forgiven, that his sins were not as great as others, will reflect that thinking in showing his love for God. We will see this later on. His love for God will be in proportion to the obligation he feels to Him for forgiveness. I might add, so what is overcoming?

Those who have not really seen themselves as they really are, who feel they have not sinned much, and therefore much forgiveness is not really required for them, will give evidence of that in their thinking, in the way they conduct themselves, in the way that they overcome. But those who really see what they are, and still are, and what they were, they realize the tremendous need for Jesus Christ and for His sacrifice and forgiveness. Because of that they will do all they can to give evidence to God of their love by doing all they can to overcome and to take on the nature of Jesus Christ.

The principle is, then, out of all of this, obedience to God's law is the evidence God is looking for, the evidence that tells Him that we truly love Him. It could be said then that overcoming is the evidence that God is looking for from each of us that tells Him we deeply love Him. The bottom line is—overcoming is the evidence that God is after.

Brethren, lip service will not do it. We have had thousands of years of lip service to God and it has not accomplished a thing.

Isaiah 29:13 Therefore the Lord said: "Inasmuch as these people draw near Me with their mouths and honor Me with their lips, but have removed their hearts far from Me, and their fear toward Me is taught by the commandment of men."

In other words, they did not fear God. They listened to what other men had to say about God rather than researching it themselves and considering it. They kept up their forms of religion. They went to Sabbath services, they tithed, they did all of these things, but they withheld their true affection.

They did not give God the heart, and therefore He said that He would inflict a deserved punishment on them. It is so much more than just going through the rituals. He states that they all had the right words and devotions, but they have not given Him their innermost being—their heart—and truly becoming converted.

Let us go back to the New Testament and paraphrase this.

Matthew 15:7-9 "Hypocrites! Well did Isaiah prophesy of you, saying [He is saying here that Isaiah prophesied of the nature of Israel. The nature of Israel was to give lip service. It was to not do it from the heart. He said], "These people draws near to Me with their mouth, and honors Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me. But in vain they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men."

What He is saying here is we are to worship God in spirit and truth, and without worshipping Him in that way, we are worshipping in vain.

Brethren, when we first came into the church and considered baptism, we basically had to answer four questions to be certain that we were doing what was right in what we were considering. This first question was: Does God exist? And we proved that by the creation we saw all around us. When we really stopped to think about it, we saw that God did exist, that this could not have come to pass without God's creating it.

The second question was: Is the Bible God's Word? And we proved this by fulfilled prophecy.

The third question was: Is the church that I am considering coming into here, the Worldwide Church of God, was it teaching God's Word? We proved this by proving in the Bible by what was taught to us.

And then the final question, which was a tough one: Am I ready to obey that truth? Once we answered that, then we were baptized.

With overcoming, we have to answer the same questions that we might have a base of sound belief to work from. We must know that God exists. We must know that the instructions in Bible are, in fact, His words, and we must know that what we are being taught is correct. And then we have to face ourselves and ask, "Am I willing to trust what God tells me to do and then obey it?" The same thing with overcoming, because some things we just do not want to overcome.

Brethren, we live in a difficult time for overcoming. We live in a country that is prosperous, even though we have stock market problems and things like this, we are still prosperous, and there does not seem to be a need to rush to overcome. We also have Satan who is very active and influences our minds and convinces us that we do not have to overcome. He puts wrong thoughts to contribute to our desires and actions, and in a sense he can just say, "let down."

Now I have always found it difficult to overcome and the reason is that my Jeremiah 17:9 mind works overtime. It justifies my actions and it will always allow to slip right back into the sins that I had before and the wrong thoughts and my weaknesses. So a minister mentioned sometime back that he was called early in life because it took him so long to learn a lesson. I thought he was talking about me. And I am sure I am in the same boat that he is in, and I am finally starting to learn a few things after all these years.

It was not until later life that I saw that I was not getting anywhere with my weaknesses. And the fault was not in God; the fault was mine because I tended to absolve myself of my guilt. I would use things to justify it. It was because of my human nature. It had to be that way. Or maybe it was just because of circumstances. I was really squeezed into doing the wrong thing here. It was not really my fault.

And then, of course, I was the head of the home and when you are in charge that gives you certain license to do things that maybe are not right, and even worse sometimes, perhaps because I was an elder I could get away with things that I should not have. My mind would offer every excuse I could find to sort of put off overcoming.

Now God in His love will bring what we need to overcome to our attention, and He will do this in a variety of ways. Sometimes it will come from husbands and wives to each other. My wife, when we were raising our children when our family was young, kept coming to me saying, "Honey, you're too tough on the kids," and so she softened me. Over the years she has had the ability to point out where I was weak and she would tell me, "Honey, you're doing this wrong." Hopefully, I have done the same thing for her.

Even our children, who trusted me enough to come to me and say, "Dad, you're doing this wrong." And because of their coming to me and telling me I would listen to what they said and I would say, "You know, you're right" and I would change.

I remember the story of this one minister who would always speed down this one road. It was sort of a fast street and little kids lived on the road. He was driving down one day and this little girl threw a rock at him. She was about five or six years old and she shouted, "Slow down. What's wrong with you?" She may have used some other name that he did not care for. He said the first thought that came into his mind was, "Who does that ill-mannered little brat think she is, telling me, a big minister of God, what to do?" And as he thought about it, he thought she did exactly what was right. He said, "I was wrong" and he overcame speeding down the road because he took the correction.

Brethren, sometimes our need to overcome will be shown to us by the circumstances we find that we placed ourselves in. This could evidence itself with health problems, by eating the wrong things, by not exercising. It could be a harmful substance problem that we have that we have not gotten rid of. It could be lustful problems, financial problems, legal problems. It could be painful social situations. It could be marital situations that are not right.

And the solution to these problems is simply repenting and overcoming of the wrong actions that you took to put yourself in these situations in the first place. And by following God's principles in these areas, these will start to bring you out of it. That is called overcoming.

God is a practical God and He gives us practical advice to help us to overcome. Please turn over to Matthew 5. There are principles that come from this.

Matthew 5:29-30 "If your right eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and cast it from you; for it is more profitable for you that one of your members should perish, than for your whole body to be cast into hell. And if your right hand cause you to sin, cut it off and cast it from you; for it is more profitable for you that one of your members should perish, than your whole body to be cast into hell [or into *gehenna*, or into the grave]."

In the Hebrew, different parts of the body represented different attitudes. When God refers to the bowels, He refers to compassion inside you. When referring to the heart, it was affections and feelings. And when He referred to the loins of a person, it meant understanding secret purposes. But when He refers to the eye, an evil eye, it denotes sometimes envy, evil passion, or sin in general.

When He referred to the right hand and the right eye, these are the strong parts of the body. These are what we use the most. What He is saying here is however strong the passion may be, and how difficult to part with, yet we should do it. We should get rid of it. And in the phrase, "if your right eye offends you," *offend* does not sound too strong today. Back then it had a stronger meaning. It meant a sin or a stumbling block is in your way, and a trap that would snare you and capture you. As applied to morals it means to signify anything by which we fall for or are snared by.

The sense of it all is no matter how long we have these habits with us, these sins, how adamant these sins and wrong pulls are, we must discipline ourselves and remove our sins from us. And in a practical application, we are to physically remove ourselves from temptation and we are to physically remove temptation from us. We are to overcome. We are to change, to be different. We are to be like Jesus Christ.

Brethren, to do this we have to go before God in prayer and be really serious about our repentance. Turn over to Luke 18 please. I could not help but consider how Luke 18 seemed to parallel what we read in Luke 7 about the Pharisee who felt that his sins were not all that bad.

Luke 18:9-14 And He spoke this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others: "Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, 'God, I thank you that I am not as other men—extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I possess.' And the publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, 'God be merciful to me a sinner!' [Then Jesus Christ said] I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted."

The tax collector realized the seriousness of his sin. He knew what his nature was. He knew what his mind was like, and he trembled in coming in the presence of God. See, that is the first step brethren. With his eyes to the ground, he made no boast of how great he was or all the wonderful things he had done because he knew God saw the sin that he had committed and he was broken up by that. He acknowledged his faults before God. I am sure he made every attempt never to repeat that sin again. Just as the woman who had her sins forgiven in Luke 7, God said, "Your sins have been forgiven. Your faith has made you whole, and you can go on and live this new life that you are in now."

God says in Isaiah 57:15, I will dwell with the humble. That is who I will live with, the one who is contrite.

Brethren, overcoming is hard. There are no two ways about it. It is what our job is. Saying you are sorry to someone you have offended is difficult. I have had to do that. Putting away sin requires great effort and discipline of mind. That is difficult. Rejecting the world we live in can be frightening because of the ridicule that might come upon us for what we keep: the Sabbath, the holy days, for being scrupulously honest. I have been laughed at for being honest. And changing the habits, the temperaments, the approaches, the attitudes of a lifetime can be terrifying, because when we do this we make ourselves vulnerable. It is really hard to do!

God certainly wants us to do this because we love Him. But He has an ulterior motive as well. He wants us to do this because He knows this will bring happiness to us. Sometimes making the change seems so uphill, so difficult. Yet, when we make the change and we are doing what God wants, then joy and happiness come to us because of it.

Fulfilling the role that God has given each of us will produce great joy in us. Sometimes it is difficult to change habits we have had for so long. It is difficult to change resentments. And for husbands sometimes it is difficult to lead, and for wives it is sometimes very difficult to submit. But when we do it, there is peace in the home. There is harmony. This is what God wants.

Proverbs 16:7 When a man's ways please the Lord, he makes even his enemies to be at peace with him.

When a man starts to live God's way, he builds characteristics and habits. He builds ethics that the world notices. They notice something different about him but because the man is like, in a sense, God in the way that he conducts himself, even the world likes him. And God is our guardian and the defense of all who love Him.

Psalm 37:3-11 Trust in the Lord, and do good [take on the nature of God]; dwell in the land, and feed on His faithfulness. Delight yourself also in the Lord, and He shall give you the desires of your heart. Commit your way to the Lord, trust also in Him, and He shall bring it to pass. He shall bring forth your righteousness as the light, and your justice as the noonday. Rest in the Lord, and wait patiently for Him; do not fret because of him who prospers in his way, because of the man who brings wicked schemes to pass. Cease from anger, and forsake wrath; do not fret—it only causes harm. For evildoers shall be cut off; but those who wait on the Lord, they shall inherit the earth. For yet a little while and the wicked shall be no more; indeed, you will look carefully for his place, but it shall be no more. But the meek shall inherit the earth, and shall delight themselves in the abundance of peace.

These are some of the promises that God gives to those who overcome and who love Him.

This does not mean that we will not be tested, that we will not be tried, that we will not be caused to grow by circumstances that God places us in. What it does mean is that when we are overcoming, God will be with us and we will have the joy and satisfaction in us that can only come from obeying and pleasing God.

Here is a principle too that I think we all have to remember. When God sees us working diligently at our calling, then He is going to start to work diligently with us. He will really start to work with us and start to make changes. When you diligently desire to overcome, God is going to be in your corner all the way on this.

We all look forward to the Feast of Tabernacles every year, and then we go through a time period, where if we are not careful we can let down. And yet this is a time period that we can apply the things we were taught toward overcoming and prepare to take the Passover in a better fashion than we ever have before.

I know when I take the Passover I say I am clean and then two or three months down the road something happens and I say, Oh no, or maybe ten minutes down the road. This is the time to overcome. This is the time when we can apply what we have learned and take this time to really work at overcoming.

It seems we do not know how much time we have left and no one else does either, but one of the major warnings is given to us is to not be weary in well-doing. In Deuteronomy 8, God tells us and we are warned, not to forget God in times of prosperity. And, of course in Matthew 25 we are warned not to let down and go to sleep.

When things start to happen, events will take place quickly. I will tell you, that will not be the time to start to overcome. The time for that is now while we still have time to develop godly character and faith and closeness to God that we really need to have.

God does give us a wonderful promise back in Revelation 21. The time setting for this scripture is at the end of the age. It is a time when all will be finished. It will be a time when there is no more time to overcome. It is time when the great work that God set forth to do will be completed. And it is a time each of us should consider. A time that could be utterly terrifying, or a time that can be filled with so much wonder, and awesomely wonderful things that we could ever contemplate.

Revelation 21:5-7 Then He who sat on the throne said, "Behold, I make all things new." And He said to me, "Write, for these words are true and faithful." And He said to me, "It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End [and at this time it will be totally true because He will have started and it will be the completion]. I will give of the fountain of the water of life freely to him who thirsts. He who overcomes shall inherit all things [everything I have got, the heavens, the universe, the future, the job, happiness, everything will I give to him who overcomes], and I will be his God and he shall be My son."

Brethren, let us not let down, but let us take our calling seriously. Let us take this time that we have been given between now and the end of the age. Let us work as hard as we can to overcome.