

Sin And Overcoming (Part 3): The Battle For Eternal Life

Overcoming On Two Fronts

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A couple of decades ago, I was talking with a very likeable man who was a member of the church, about the lack of effort many church members seem to make when it came to keeping the Sabbath, and how so many set almost anything as a higher priority in their lives than God.

During the course of our conversation, I added that there seemed to be a lot of people with a Laodicean (that is, a lukewarm) approach to obeying and submitting to God. The man's reply stunned me. He said, "I don't mind being Laodicean, they're God's church too." I just was so stunned that I did not say anything after that.

But, just as a real quick review, turn to Revelation 3, and see what God says about the Laodiceans:

Revelation 3:15-16 "I know your works, that you are neither cold nor hot. I could wish you were cold or hot. So then, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will vomit you out of My mouth."

So, was that man telling me that he did not mind being vomited out of God's mouth? I do not think that he had read the scriptures.

Revelation 3:17 Because you say, 'I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing'—and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked—

So apparently, this man was okay with those descriptive terms of himself. Again, he probably did not read the scriptures.

Revelation 3:18-21 I counsel you to buy from Me gold refined in the fire, that you may be rich; and white garments, that you may be clothed, that the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed; and anoint your eyes with eye salve, that you may see. As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten. Therefore be zealous and repent. Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine

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with him, and he with Me. To him who overcomes I will grant to sit with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne.

Therefore, obviously, it is not okay to be Laodicean. In fact, there is a lot of work that a Laodicean has to do.

The church member that I referred to did not see any need to change or overcome anything in his life. He felt that he was just fine as long as he attended Sabbath services, most of the time. He was not in the least interested in drawing closer to God, or improving his character. He just thought, in general, that he was okay as a Laodicean.

The word 'overcome,' according to Webster's dictionary, means "to conquer, to overpower, to overwhelm, to render helpless." That is not a temporary change. This man had pretty much defeated himself, and had given up the battle.

In overcoming the "old man" or the "old self," we must conquer it. We must destroy it, as Paul tells us in his letter to the Roman congregation.

Romans 6:6 Knowing this, that our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin.

We have struggled for years to overcome this "old man" which is our own human nature, only to find remnants that are still within us. Realizing this often causes a feeling of failure and discouragement. However, we should realize that our human nature both contributes to, and reflects, the influence of the world.

In order to overcome, we must disassociate ourselves from wrong guidance and wrong pulls, and associate ourselves with God, and those who follow Him, in order to take on God's characteristics.

What does church history reveal?

God's church is the congregation of people who follow God and His laws, His ways and instructions, and so they are easily traced down through history.

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In Christ's message to the historical eras of God's church, since the church was founded in A.D. 31, in chapters 2 and 3 of the Revelation, Christ showed each church era which of its works were righteous and which needed to be changed. If we study Christ's message carefully, we can learn what behavior does and does not please God.

What had God's church been doing wrong? Christ listed the characteristic sins of each era of which His church needed to repent:

The first era had left its first love.

One had embraced false doctrines and allowed sexual immorality.

Another had also allowed false doctrines which enticed people to commit sexual immorality.

Another had spiritually died because it stopped growing spiritually while living in the past. It also stopped watching the signs of the times and for Christ's return.

Still another was lukewarm, having dead works, lacking zeal for God's truth. In addition, she relied on her own efforts from which she received earthly benefits.

So obviously, those are things that as a church group, or era, we certainly do not want to be guilty of any of those.

Christ told the churches to repent of these dead and evil works. If they did not, He would fight against them with the sword of His mouth, and blot their names out of the Book of Life. God was very serious in what He inspired to be revealed by Jesus Christ, to John, in the book of Revelation.

Revelation 2:16 Repent, or else I will come to you quickly and will fight against them with the sword of My mouth.

Repentance means to stop doing evil works and start doing right works, to live righteously. This is such a simple definition, but that is basically what it means.

On the other hand: What had God's church been doing right, in the way of comparison,

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to help us to be encouraged to do these things?

They had not tolerated evil.

They had checked up on false apostles and proved them liars.

They had hated pagan deeds.

They had endured patiently.

They had labored in righteousness for Christ's name's sake.

They had not fainted or given up.

They had endured tribulation—including poverty, prison, and martyrdom.

They had held fast to God's name.

They had not denied the faith.

They had love, faith, and good works.

They had watched and prayed.

They had kept God's Word.

These are the characteristics and traits that we certainly want to be known for.

Jesus Christ very clearly revealed that there is hope, even for the Laodiceans, if they overcome.

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

So even though the church of God, down through the ages, has been guilty of those wrong doings, God still has a positive attitude that if we all overcome, we will not be blotted out of the Book of Life. He is very positive in this statement of what He gives us,

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and His promises.

A person with the Laodicean attitude must change—must overcome—or he will have his name blotted out from God's book containing the names of those who are to receive eternal life.

The way to prevent sin, and to overcome, is to let God's Spirit fill your mind with God's way of life.

Colossians 3:2 "Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth."

The way to put a thing out of your mind is to put the opposite thought in the mind.

We have all noticed parents of babies desperately trying to quiet their crying baby in church. There is something in the baby's mind that is causing its crying or fussing. Just saying "no" or "be quiet" or any other command for the baby to stop fussing does not usually get positive results. It does get results if a parent has worked with the child during the week, but even still as hard as a parent may work with the child during the week, sometimes nothing you say will quiet that child.

There is a gimmick to quieting the baby by getting its mind on something else. Often, instead of commanding him to stop crying, attract his attention with some new thing—get him interested in playing with that thing. Depending on the age of the child, even a writing pen can work well. Very quickly, the child will forget all about crying. That advice is from Herbert W. Armstrong who was in enough services and stood in front of enough groups to know what worked, and he had children himself.

The same principle applies to adults. Try using the same method on yourself. Instead of material or worldly things, a mature person will use self-discipline and set his mind on spiritual things.

If you open your Bible and put a spiritual subject in your mind through Bible study, the next time you are tempted you will be amazed at how well that works. Pray about it, asking God to help you. Watch how rapidly you begin to conquer temptation and sin, and how much growth you see in your spiritual and character growth.

Merely learning these things and doing them occasionally is not enough. We must grow in the habit of doing right consistently, persevering in godly behavior throughout our lives. When we do so, a pattern of behavior is formed—habits that give us a new and

good character.

We not only have to renounce Satan's ways, but we have to follow Christ's way of life consistently in order to reflect godliness and in order to make it a habit in our lives. We must completely put out the old character and not let it live in our lives again.

Our continuous right behavior, led by God's Holy Spirit, finally becomes our habit and characterizes us as one of God's people—as true Christians. That is what it means to overcome. That is also one of the big differences between the non-Christian and the Christian.

Even a Christian may have some ongoing problem with sin—some point of weakness, maybe even secret—and he has been unable to overcome. It is fairly common for a Christian to struggle with temptation, only to wake up a little later to the remorseful fact that we had slipped and failed to overcome.

Human nature will always be prone to weakness toward temptation, but it should be conquered over time. The same goes for Satan's influence as well as the world's tug on us. The Holy Spirit helps us to overcome all sin, but it requires work on our part. You have heard the old adage "If you don't use it, you'll lose it." That is the way it is with the Holy Spirit. If you neglect the use of the Holy Spirit in overcoming then you will lose that power to do that.

Sin is serious—it has to be overcome—it has to be conquered because our future depends on it. Temptations have to be resisted and bad habits have to be cleansed thoroughly from our lives if we expect to receive the gift of salvation, membership in the Kingdom of God, and to inherit eternal life.

Since we are tempted when we are drawn away by our own desires, sin begins in the mind, the key to overcoming is realizing that it starts early on there.

The temptation is in the mind. When we think about the thing that tempts us, when we let our mind dwell on it and turn it over in our mind—whether it is a desire to go some place, to do something, or to have something we know is wrong—then, thinking about it finally conceives. That is, it leads to action and breeds sin.

The result is, we finish by doing the thing we kept thinking about, wanting to do. If we keep thinking about it, after a while we will be unable to resist it. That is why we have lost so many of these struggles against sin because we kept thinking about it, desiring it, wanting it.

God's Word comforts and encourages us with this guarantee:

I Corinthians 10:13 No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it.

Has it ever seemed, in your experience, that God has failed to keep this promise? I think it has, because I have heard people talking about how frustrated they are over certain overcoming or certain problems in their lives. Temptation has come and we have struggled, even prayed, even still we were overpowered, and we did not find the way of escape. What was wrong?

We know that we have God's promises:

Hebrews 13:5-6 For He Himself has said, "I will never leave you nor forsake you." So we may boldly say: "The Lord is my helper; I will not fear. What can man do to me?"

We have those guarantees. In addition, the apostle Paul told the Christians in Rome, "Sin shall not have dominion over you." There is another guarantee.

Sometimes we feel like sin has had dominion over us, holding us as its slave. We fight it desperately, sometimes even with tears—only to feel like we have failed. Why do we feel this way? Is there something wrong with us?

It may be because we have not known how to receive, apply, and use the faith God promises to give.

First, we must *do something*. Some go to one extreme and try to do it all. Others swing to the opposite extreme, plead with God, make little effort themselves, and expect Him to do it all.

James 4:7 Submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you.

There we see part of our responsibility in this. This takes effort. Peter says to humble ourselves, casting all our cares upon Christ, and to be sober and vigilant, because the

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devil is walking about, watching for the chance to tempt us when we are off our guard. We should resist him, steadfast in the faith, as Peter tells us in chapter five of his first epistle. We are to resist Satan, and do it in the faith of Christ.

We have to be vigilant regarding the works that we are to do to have a living faith. We have to be prepared and always on guard. It takes constant, continuous, watchful effort, never letting down. This is something that is very hard to do—to keep the pressure consistently on overcoming those shortcomings.

Unless we, ourselves, had to put forth some effort we could not be overcomers. And, if we had the power to do it all ourselves, we would not need God. Therefore, it requires our effort empowered by God's Holy Spirit.

James 4:8 Draw near to God and He will draw near to you.

It is not a matter of sitting back and letting God take care of these things. We have a lot of work to do.

When temptation comes, often we are too far from God—and we are then unable, suddenly, on the spur of the moment, to get close enough to Him to get the help and the deliverance we need. It takes time to get close to God, into that intimate contact with Him for the power that we suddenly need. I think that we have all made that mistake over the years. We have strayed from being close to God and then we have really needed Him, and we have been too far and our faith has waned.

In other words, when temptation unexpectedly has come, we have found ourselves caught off guard, out of prayer, and out of spiritual training. It is as if we were entering a contest with Satan. We tried to wrestle with him, but we were out of training, out of shape, and we were out of spiritual condition.

Satan is the prince of the power of the air—of the world. He has been ruling it for 6,000 years, so he has a lot of experience under his belt. Since he is spirit, he does not get tired. How much stronger is Satan by comparison? He has been exercising his abilities (as perverse as they are) for millennia.

But in the other corner of the ring is the short life-spanned human being, who, until God calls him has squandered away, entertained, and weakening himself physically and mentally. It is interesting to put these two face to face theoretically and who has more power? Satan does, but we have access to the power of God.

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Is the weak human suddenly able to summon enough strength and skill to conquer the power driving the world system of politics, economics, education, philosophy, and religion?

Can anyone win any competitive sport unless he has rigorously trained and prepared himself carefully for the race, contest, or game—unless he was in condition when it came? There are going to be a lot of men playing softball at the Feast. I understand it is going to be the forty and over against the younger ones. The forty and over are going to find out that they are out of condition, not all of them, but there are going to be some aches and pains after that. The aches and pains that we get in the battle with Satan are much worse and much more painful.

We cannot win these spiritual battles if we are untrained and out of training spiritually. All spiritual power and strength must come from God. We can only absorb that power if we are in close contact with Him—in fellowship with Him.

Otherwise, when temptations suddenly assault us, no matter how hard we try, or cry out to God for help, we are too far away from Him to get help. That is not a true statement if you take it in its strictest sense; God is always there to help for the person who is in the right frame of mind. This is talking about the person who is not in the right frame of mind, and has strayed from God and neglected Bible study and prayer.

If we draw near to God, and keep close to Him in faith, our problem will be solved. He will give us the power to overcome through His Holy Spirit. We can keep in spiritual training if we keep our minds and our thoughts on spiritual things.

Paul warns the Colossian members, in chapter 3, that most people keep their minds filled with earthly, material cares. We are fighting that constantly. People in the church who are tending to be worldly turn to the spiritual only occasionally. However, we are to seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness.

Sometimes it takes a great effort of humbly fasting and earnestly praying. We must be determined to persevere for as long as it takes to conquer Satan, the world, and our own human nature.

It seems that many Christians believe that all they have to do is hold on. That seems to be what the gentleman I spoke about at the beginning of the sermon thought that he had to do, just hold on as a Laodicean—to maintain his present character. However, true Christians are constantly growing—constantly producing the fruit of the Holy Spirit. In fact, that is one of the ways that we can see whether we are truly Christians or not.

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Are we producing any fruit? We know that the wheat and tares grow up together until the wheat is mature and until then they look identical.

God is now calling some to a life of separation—to a new, different, and spiritually motivated life—so that they can be completely cleansed of sin, and so that they can grow in grace and knowledge. In this way they will be prepared and trained for a tremendous responsibility, as a king and priest, in God's Kingdom.

It is only those who qualify by the training, the overcoming, the spiritual development and growth, during this present life, who will reign with Christ. These personal responsibilities are all actions that require effort. No one is going to get into God's Kingdom without making effort. Salvation is a gift from God and so is eternal life, but we have our responsibility, as you know.

So the Christian's life is a new and different life—an overcoming life, in which we are made righteous and holy.

Why do so many of us continually stumble and fall spiritually? Even those who do strive and struggle, and do pray for help and victory over some nagging habit still have failures in overcoming.

The apostle Paul sheds some light on this in his letter to the Philippians. Here, Paul is talking about how he, before he was converted, had been attacking and putting his effort all into that and it was all for naught. It counted for loss for Christ, as he says.

Philippians 3:9 and be found in Him, not having my own righteousness, which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith;

It might be more correct to say, '*the righteousness of Christ.*'

Notice, it is not our righteousness, but God's. David was inspired to write,

Psalms 119:172 My tongue shall speak of Your word, for all Your commandments are righteousness.

And we know that love is the fulfilling of the law, the doing of the Ten Commandments.

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Often people struggle along, trying to keep the commandments in their own power and strength—thinking it is their own personal human love that fulfills the law. However, we see right here that it is God's love that He provides to us.

Many commandment keepers have only been converted to the argument of keeping God's commandments, and never experienced definite repentance. In contrast, a real conversion is a definite life-altering experience.

A repentant person needs to go to a private place alone with God, get on his knees, pour out his heart to God, and stay with it until he knows that he has really repented.

No wonder so many become discouraged, and feel like giving up, if they do not even have the kind of love that fulfills God's law and makes them righteous. Love is of God, because God is love. If a person is feeling like they have failed because their love is not sufficient, well they are right. Human love is insufficient.

And it takes "the love of God ... poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit" to fulfill the law and give us God's righteousness.

The law is spiritual. We are flesh. It takes a *spiritual love* to fulfill a *spiritual law*. The Holy Spirit within us is merely God's law in action. Since God alone can supply the love that makes us righteous, it becomes God's righteousness, not ours. We can take no credit for receiving salvation and eternal life when it comes.

How do we receive the love?

Philippians 3:9 and be found in Him, not having my own righteousness, which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith;

Love comes by faith. This faith is not something that we ourselves must work up and supply by some kind of hard effort. To strive to try to have faith requires a tremendous amount of effort. If we, ourselves, could earn our own salvation by works, it would be the kind of righteousness that is detestable to God. We cannot work up a righteous faith.

We must acquire the faith of Christ as a gift from God. Jesus had real faith. He performed miracles. Moreover, He rose from the dead and He lives. He gives His strong faith to us. Faith is one of the spiritual gifts from God.

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We get more of it by submitting our desires, our purposes, and our will to Him, by asking Him in earnest persevering prayer, and by trusting Him to give it. We are required to submit, ask, pray, and trust. What is required of us in order to receive the love that comes by faith is the gift of faith that enables us to have God's love.

We are instructed by the apostle John, "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." John later quotes Jesus, "In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world." Jesus knows what we are going through because He has already been through it, and suffered in a similar way.

How did Christ overcome the world? He overcame by loving the Father and following His instructions, even though Christ was tempted in all the ways that we are. He also did it by showing Satan, in a face-to-face confrontation, that He would not follow anyone else but God. Job had to show God that he too would follow no one else but God, and we as individuals have to show God that. That is why God allows Satan to confront us and to come after us and influence us, so that both God and we can see us stand up to him.

By overcoming the world, Christ qualified to replace Satan's rebellious rulership over the earth, and the Father resurrected Christ to eternal life. Christ conquered the enticements and corruption of this world, which end in death.

We have been called to work now. Even more important than helping to get the gospel out, we have to follow Christ's example—live as He lived and lives—and overcome the world. How can anyone be a witness to the world if he is not carefully imitating Christ? A person who is not imitating Christ and following Christ but tries to witness to the world is giving a wrong witness and misleading the world.

We have been entangled in the world since birth, and have given in to Satan's temptations many times. We must continue to come out of this world and overcome it by becoming free of its binding customs, its rewards, its punishments, and its will to have its own way apart from God.

Instead, we have to pursue God's way of love that is benevolence, the way of God's law. Benevolence includes: kindness, compassion, generosity, and good will. It is a disposition to do good works, but not for show—not to be seen.

Jesus' brothers recognized this principle about human nature, and they wrongly accused Jesus of wanting notoriety. John 7 records their snide words to Jesus:

John 7:4 For no one does anything in secret while he himself seeks to be known openly.

Jesus' brothers recognized that and they accused Jesus of it. In verses 6 and 7, Jesus replied to His brothers and said, "My time has not yet come, but your time is always ready. The world cannot hate you, but it hates Me because I testify of it that its works are evil."

By "My time has not yet come," Jesus was saying it is not time for God to send Him to do that. He was always thinking of His Father's will.

Jesus was waiting for the time when His Father would reveal who He was and what He had come to do. He was not going to go out into the world and preach without His Father's go ahead, so to speak. It is appallingly arrogant for a church leader to proclaim himself as one of the two witnesses, or the head of the only true church organization. God will reveal such things according to His will, and in His own time frame.

One principle we see here, that the world is guilty of, is that those who do good things just to be seen, usually let the person (or people) whom they are trying to impress know that they are being so generous, so righteous, or so good. The only reward they will ever get—praise from the human being that they were trying to impress.

Matthew 6:1-4 Take heed that you do not do your charitable deeds before men, to be seen by them. Otherwise you have no reward from your Father in heaven. Therefore, when you do a charitable deed, do not sound a trumpet before you as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may have glory from men. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward. But when you do a charitable deed, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, that your charitable deed may be in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will Himself reward you openly.

This is the difference between the Christian and the world: Enmity against God or glorifying God.

Christ gave His life so we can be forgiven for our self-centered living—our sins— when we repent of them. We must give up our lives—give up living after the flesh—and let Christ live His life in us, being led by God's Spirit. Paul words it this way:

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Galatians 2:20 I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.

By letting His life live in us we become an example to the world. We become like a beacon of light for the world to see because the world is in spiritual darkness. The world hates spiritual light. Since by living God's way of life we reflect spiritual light, the world hates us just as it hated Him.

It is this process of turning away from evil and living by God's perfect way of love that is called overcoming.

Sometimes, in a general sense, the Christian and the non-Christian seem alike. So, what is the difference between the Christian and the non-Christian?

The commandments of God should not be a burden to a Christian. The way that we show that we love God is by keeping His commands. As we obey Him by keeping His commandments, which are the foundational laws of His way of life, we learn to reflect His love. That is fundamental Christianity.

I John 5:2-3 By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and keep His commandments. For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments. And His commandments are not burdensome. For whatever is born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith. Who is he who overcomes the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?

I cannot think of a person in the world who would not think that His commandments are burdensome. John uses the word 'for' here, to show that he is continuing something that he has already mentioned. This love of God is why the commandments are not heavy to the Christian.

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

We should be more than conquerors with respect to the law. The Ten Commandments

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are the commandments of God to men and women at all times, in all circumstances, and in all places. They have never been reduced, modified, or changed.

Here in verses 4 and 5, John is concerned with helping us to understand this in a very practical way. He tells us that, in a sense, the difference between the Christian and the non-Christian is that to the non-Christian, the commandments are burdensome—they are quite heavy in how they cramp the non-Christian's lifestyle.

The commandments to a non-Christian are a bondage—a heavy weight around their necks. In their hearts they hate God because of this, and they will even lie to themselves to be released out from under them.

But not to the Christian, God's commandments are not a tough task, not a terrible duty to the one who really is born of God and is in close fellowship with Him.

So here is the test that we must all put to ourselves: What is our attitude to the commandments of God? Do we feel that the Christian life is a burden? Do we merely attempt to keep the commandments because we are afraid not to, or are we living the Christian life because we enjoy it? Do we recognize that they are essentially right, and do we long to conform to them on an ever-increasing basis?

Our answer to these questions may very well declare whether we are Christians or not. I cannot make that judgment. I am not God. This is what John is getting at: the world, Satan, and our own human nature are what make people feel that the commandments of God are tedious.

John said, "And His commandments are not burdensome. For whatever is born of God overcomes the world."

John spent a lot of time dealing with the subject of the world in the second chapter of this epistle.

I John 2:15-17 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. 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. And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever.

He who does the will of God is replacing those temptations and those sins with God's

way of life.

This is probably the most complete statement in Scripture of what the New Testament means by this term 'the world.' The whole New Testament pictures a Christian's life as a life of conflict—not a life of burden but a life of conflict. We are in an atmosphere, and in a world, where there is a ferocious fight going on.

There are two kingdoms: the kingdom of light and the kingdom of darkness, and there are always these constant conflicts and contrasts. You are very familiar with what Paul says in Ephesians 6:

Ephesians 6:12 For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places.

I have dwelt quite a bit over the last several months on the world, and what it is, because in reading John's letters, and the gospel of John, it is very obvious that he feels that coming out of the world is extremely important. I have tried in the last three sermons especially to emphasize sin and overcoming.

We are in a spiritual battle for our lives. As this age draws closer to an end we have to be ready, as I said earlier, and to be spiritually conditioned to be able to withstand what is coming against us.

The apostle John says the world is there the whole time, and the Christian is fighting against it; so it is important that we know what this means. Maybe the best way of defining what the New Testament means by 'the world' is that it is everything that is opposed to God. Now there are things that are in the world that are not opposed to God but that are good to do—such as water skiing, baseball, apple pie, and on and on. I am not talking about those types of things, I am talking about attitudes and outlook and those things.

God calls on us to worship Him and to glorify Him; He calls on us to live for His glory. The main purpose of life is to glorify God and to become like Him. We are meant to glorify God in every conceivable way. In addition, the world is everything that tries to prevent our doing that.

'The world' is not just worldly entertainment and nothing else. Some people fondly imagine that they have finished with the world just because they do not do certain

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things. We may be as much in the world (in a theoretical sense) as we attend Sabbath services, as we are in a cinema or theater, if we are proud of what we are and if we see no sin in us.

Remember, 'the world' is everything that stands between us and our glorifying God completely, totally, and absolutely. It is not a physical location, necessarily. The world is something that we have to consider both outside ourselves, and within us.

Outside ourselves the world does its best to prevent us from glorifying God by its attractions and its temptations. We are all well aware of this. Attractions and temptations are everything that the world holds before us, with which it tries to appeal to us, and that is calculated to draw us away from God. This is not the whole of what 'the world' means, but that is part of it.

Not only that—it is a person's outlook. There are many people in the world today who would not dream of spending their time reading sexually explicit gossip stories, or gruesome perverse child abuse stories in the newspapers or on the internet—they are too intelligent. Still, a person may be as much a victim of the world as the people who spend their time doing that.

The world is opposed to God in its outlook, in its mind, in its mentality, in its own wisdom—worldly wisdom. It is against God in its own understanding, in its intellectualism that would banish God and ridicule His way of life. That is as much the world as the life of a criminal.

Still further, the world does its best to prevent us from glorifying God by persecuting us. It has many ways of doing that. Sometimes it does it by means of ridicule; it just laughs at us and makes us feel that we are not intellectual. When ridicule does not succeed, it sometimes becomes isolation; and we just find people drifting away. That is a very terrible form of persecution, a very subtle and a very vicious one.

Sometimes persecution may even be physical. Billions of people on the earth are of this world and influenced by Satan's hatred toward God. Whole Asian and Middle Eastern countries imprison professing Christians and anyone resembling them if they can get away with it. The persecution is increasing. It may be that some true Christians are chosen by God to be martyrs, as a witness for Him—what an honor! Not a desire of ours, of course, but what an honor.

Alan Sears, president and general counsel of Alliance Defense Fund in his newsletter:

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". . . points to Oconee County, South Carolina—one of the many current targets for the ACLU in America's Southeast—where the county council had a tradition of beginning meetings with prayer. For that "violation" of the so-called "separation of church and state," it received the following warning from the ACLU:

"Your sectarian invocations. . . are blatant violations of federal law. . . As you may know, the Town of Great Falls was required to pay well over \$50,000 in legal fees that were incurred because of their stubbornness in persisting to use similar invocations."

"At the meeting to discuss the issue, one of the ACLU's South Carolina board members delivered a specific threat:

"Prayers should not be allowed. Especially prayers to Jesus. . . . If they continue to break the law, I want to say, the handcuffs are going to come."

"Unfortunately, the county council gave into the ACLU's demands and abolished their long-standing tradition."

I use this example (and there are many others), to show the mentality of this present society—the world. Satan, using the world, is trying to prevent us from glorifying God. That is a major part of what we have to fight—the world outside us that manifests itself in those various ways.

What then is the world that is within us? We are fighting a spiritual war on both fronts. The world is outside, but also on the inside. The world is within us as well as without. 'The world' that may be within us is essentially contrary in every way to God's way of life. If that world is still in there then there is an inkling of it at least.

Romans 8:7 Because the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be. [It cannot be in any way possible, and that carnal mind has to be replaced by the mind of God.]

A person who answers God's call and receives His Spirit has spiritual knowledge

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revealed to him that the carnal mind can never understand.

I Corinthians 2:12 Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God.

The world, then, may be within us, that 'carnal mind,' as the apostle Paul puts it. The main manifestation of this is self, and everything that is covered by that little word.

Self is in opposition to glorying God. And what is self? Primarily, it is pride. Nothing is more opposed to glorifying God than pride.

John 12:42-43 Nevertheless even among the rulers many believed in Him, but because of the Pharisees they did not confess Him, lest they should be put out of the synagogue; for they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God.

It does not matter what we are proud of—our physical appearance, our mental ability, our position in life, or our success. It does not matter what it is—any feeling of pride we may have that exalts the self is antagonism to God and makes it near impossible to truly glorify Him. Pride may take various forms: a desire for praise—we all know this—and a dislike of criticism, which is the negative counterpart.

Then there is self-reliance. Self-reliance is probably one of the ways the modern world makes it most difficult for the modern man or woman to glorify God. The world has been promoting self-reliance to us for a long time: Man, the master of his fate, the controller of his destiny, and discoverer of the secrets of the universe. All these things try to usurp God's authority.

Self-help books roll off the presses by the millions. All suggest self-reliance. The more we rely on ourselves, the less we trust God, and the less we glorify Him and the less we live for Him.

And then, of course, there is ambition, a desire to get on with it and to succeed, in an unworthy sense; and selfishness, being anxious to have things for ourselves and for our own, not for somebody else and for his own; and there is self-centeredness and self-concern.

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Then out of that come jealousy, envy, and coveting; hardness in thought, sharpness in speech; and unkindness; and all other horrible things that we find listed in certain scriptures in the Bible. Paul has a list like this in Galatians 5:17-21, which you already know is 'the works of the flesh.'

All these things are 'the world' within every human being. When these things are in control and active, we are not glorifying God. It is impossible to have those things within a person and still glorify God. When we live for ourselves, we are concerned about ourselves in every shape and form. Appetites, desires, and lusts—these things arise from within and they can be very easily contrary to God.

We may be sitting by ourselves and suddenly an evil thought comes—it is the flesh, the desire of the flesh and of the mind. Quite often Satan instigates it. This is part of the world, and it is as opposed to glorifying God, as are entertainments that are provided by the world outside of us.

However, it is more than that. One of the most terrible things we have to fight is 'the flesh' as it manifests itself in the form of laziness and a love of ease. There is a sense in which we are all lazy. We have a thousand and one excuses why we do not have time to do the things we should be doing.

The natural laziness of the flesh is constantly fighting against glorifying God, standing between us and the worship of God. True rest and rejuvenation are where God's people are gathering together to worship Him. The solutions to personal problems are found where God has placed His name. If a person has access to worshipping with God's people on the Sabbath, that is where he should be.

Do not let yourself be fooled that listening to the sermon remotely on the computer is the same thing as fellowshiping and worshipping together in person. It is not. However, for some people it is all they can do, being spread far and wide. It is the next best thing to being there. God recognizes that and His Spirit is there.

There may be laziness even in the matter of sleep, and in the matter of the way we use our time. All of these things come in, and they are part of the world within us.

Then, there is a fear of softening; we all know this fear—it is a part of the flesh in us, this desire for ease. It is often a lack of trust—a lack of faith in Christ's promise to return to earth as King of kings and Lord of lords. If we really believe that He is returning soon then we would not be wasting our time. So there is that lack of faith that we all have, and we let other things in our lives interfere.

Summed up—the world is everything outside us and within us and everywhere else that is doing its best to prevent us from conforming to the picture we find of the Christian in Matthew 5, commonly referred to as the Beatitudes.

Matthew 5:3-11 Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted. Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be filled. Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God. Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake.

That is the key there, in verse 11. Are we doing things that are for Christ's sake, for God's sake? The world hates all of those things that are listed there.

The world hates nothing as much the person who submits to God in sorrowful repentance of his sins. Repentance is our part in our relationship with God and it all centers in the mind. Repentance of sin means, literally, to change one's mind in respect to sin. It is the first step to overcoming. The result is, we stop committing sin and work on overcoming the desire.

The Beatitudes are a description of how Christians should be, and the world is doing everything it can to try to stop us. It does this in the most subtle way. It does it in its suggestions to us. It is opposed to repentance and humility, because it hates the righteous direction to God. The world is everything that is opposed to the message of the Beatitudes.

The first principle is that it is the world, which tries to make the commandments grievous and tedious. It is because we are fighting all that without and within that a Christian's life seems hard. It is a conflict, but it should not be thought of as a burden.

Now the second principle involves the relationship of the Christian to the world. Christians do not conform to it. We have been commanded to be transformed and to be different. We not only do not conform to it, but we do not live as near to within it as we can (as people so often do.)

We do not just manage somehow or another not to go down with the world. John uses

the term 'overcomes the world,' three times, as we read earlier.

I John 5:4-5 For whatever is born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith. Who is he who overcomes the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God.

He is saying two things here: that the Christian is one who has overcome the world and that the Christian is one who overcomes the world.

First, we are born and we have begun to overcome the world—it is a process of conversion.

Second, upon our resurrection to eternal life we have completely overcome and conquered the world. This is accomplished because our faith, which we receive as a gift from God, through Jesus Christ, is the victory that overcame the world.

Christians are in an entirely new position. We are not like the non-Christian. We have come to see the real meaning of the world. We have come to see what it is, and we hate and detest it.

To overcome, we must have faith. As you know, *'Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.'* Prayer helps us produce and show faith. God requires us to perform works. We have to take action; and those actions are the works of prayer and overcoming. However, we must never forget that the power comes only from God through His Holy Spirit and provides His gift of faith.

Jesus Christ has already conquered the world. We know that we ourselves are in Christ; therefore, there is a sense in which we have overcome the world. Christ has overcome it, we are in Christ, and therefore we have overcome it. It is as sure to happen as if it has already happened.

On the other hand, there is a sense in which we are still overcoming it; we are already victorious, but we still have to fight.

By God's action and power we are in Christ. It is not by philosophy; not from ourselves, but by God's mercy. Paul plainly says that it was not because of human philosophy, wealth, or status that we are given these spiritual gifts, but by God as the author.

We are what we are by the mercy of God. We owe our hopes to Him. We are Christians,

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not by the action of man, but by the action of God. This mercy has been conferred on us through the work of Christ.

In one sense, we have overcome, but we are still fighting. We still have to overcome as we go on in this life walking with God and with Christ. We are increasingly overcoming, we no longer give in to the temptations that used to get us so easily, and so they no longer control us.

But even further, those who are truly Christians are in the position of being able to say honestly that they do not want to sin. We do not want to, but we still do it. Some things remain in us from that old life still, and sometimes it gets us down. This is what the Bible calls the flesh, the remains of the old man, and we hate it.

We have overcome in that sense. We have the victory through Christ, but we are not yet perfect; we have not arrived at sinless perfection. We are still tempted, and we still feel, at times, discouraged and almost defeated.

Nevertheless, our hope and encouragement comes because we know that we have the victory. We know that Jesus Christ is coming to establish God's Kingdom on earth. We know that the day is coming when we will be presented by our Lord and Savior perfectly complete before the presence of God's glory with great joy.

Sin is ever-nagging, and overcoming is always hard work, but here are Christ's promises:

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

Revelation 21:7 He who overcomes shall inherit all things, and I will be his God and he shall be My son.

God is able to do exceedingly, abundantly above all that we ask or think. If we overcome our own human nature, sin, Satan, and the world, we will receive the glorious gift of being resurrected, or changed. And we will inherit such things and conditions beyond our imagination. We will share with Jesus Christ in the glories of the eternal inheritance. That inheritance is the eternal way of life and all that it involves. All I can say to that is Wow! That is really something. God guarantees us that if we overcome, and He is there to help us with it.