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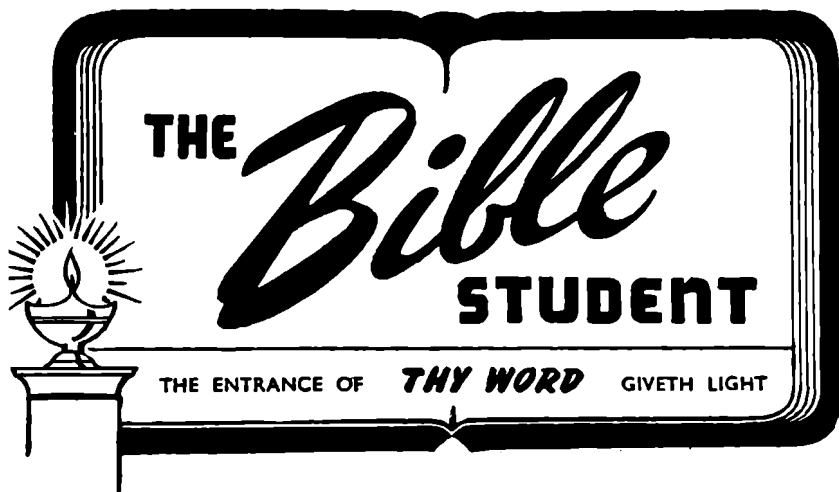
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Editor: A. McDONALD REDWOOD

WHO ARE THE OVERCOMERS?

(Revelation 2 and 3)

W. HOSTE, B.A.

The word 'overcomer' speaks of victory after a conflict. The Christian conflict is no sham fight, no mere 'Peace Manoeuvres', 'Reds versus Blues,' in which no one is wounded, and it matters little who wins; but a fight against unrelenting foes, who are dead in earnest, whatever the believer may be. The fight is none the less dangerous because the enemies are often unseen and unsuspected. Preachers are not seldom to blame in glossing over the dangers of the way. John Bunyan was too true to do this. Hence the value of the 'Pilgrim's Progress', especially in these days of apostasy.

Conversion is not the end, but the beginning. It is not the beginning of an easy, 'go-as-you-please' existence, but of a serious life. 'Let not him that girdeth on his harness boast himself, as he that putteth it off' (1 Kings 20:11). The theology that paints the Christian life as only a 'mountain-top experience,' 'a path of flowers,' is very defective. 'Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life' (1 Tim. 6:12) is more seasonable advice. 'Watch and pray, lest ye enter into temptation' (Mark 14:38).

The foes of the children of Israel were many, and there are corresponding enemies today for the Christian. Egypt represents the world in its tyranny, from which the Christian is delivered by the power of God through the Red Sea, that is, through death and resurrection with Christ. Amalek is the flesh, sin in the believer, the enemy of the wilderness, and the exhortation is, 'Let us put on the armour of light,' and 'Put ye on the Lord Jesus, and make no provision for the flesh to fulfil the lusts thereof' (Rom. 13:12, 14). Edom, Moab and Ammon, we may say, represent unconverted friends, with whom we may be necessarily thrown in close contact, and to whom we owe certain amenities, but who are at times real opponents of the Christian life. The Canaanites represent the manifold power of Satan. 'We wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual

wickedness in high [lit., heavenly] places' (Eph. 6:12). The very place of blessing is the place of conflict.

We have in this passage three phases of conflict; 'the *wiles* of the Devil,' corresponding to the unseen—the 'submarine', and 'sapping and mining' methods of modern warfare. Satan comes as an angel of light, and he is never more dangerous than when he comes with a text in his mouth, or as a pretended champion of the truth of God. Then there is the 'wrestling', the open opposition of the Adversary. He seeks to cast down the people of God from their excellency, to rob them of their inheritance, or at any rate of their present enjoyment of it. Then there are the '*fiery darts* of the wicked One,' denials of God's truth, blasphemous suggestions, it may be deadly temptations which assail the believer, and which he can quench only with 'the shield of faith.'

The Lord does not leave us without warning, nor without armour, and there are two sides to this, the inside corresponding to what man *is*, and the outside corresponding to what God *supplies*. The Christian is to be 'girt about with truth'—the truth of God—but he must be true himself. How can we hold the truth, unless we speak the truth? Similarly with the breastplate Christ, Who is 'our righteousness,' forms the outside, and a practically righteous character the inside. 'He that doeth righteousness is righteous, even as He is righteous' (1 Jolm 3:7). Our feet, too, are to be shod, that is, prepared by the Gospel of peace for the attack. Enjoy *peace* with God, if you are to engage in successful *warfare* with the enemy. So with the other pieces of the panoply of God; not one must be neglected, not one put off.

Israel had another enemy, the Philistines. They were not of the same stock as the Canaanites, who were children of Ham, but came through Mizraim, the Hebrew name for Egypt (Gen. 10:13). I judge they represent the world in its constant enmity to the people of God. It is a sad and significant fact that they eventually permeated everywhere, till the whole promised land became the land of the Philistines, or Palestine, as we know it today. One other enemy of Israel may be referred to—Babylon, representing the religious world in its allurements, a seductive enemy today.

How needful, then, for all, the exhortations primarily addressed to every earnest servant of Christ, and to the strong young men in the household of faith, 'endure hardness as a good soldier of Jesus Christ;' 'watch thou in all things, endure afflictions' (2 Tim. 2:3; 4:5)! 'Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world, (1 John 2:15). If any should think he needs them not, *he* needs them most of all, for 'let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall' (1 Cor. 9:12).

The overcomer is not the one who claims never to be overcome, but one who overcomes at last. Thus we read of the conflict with Amalek that, though there were ups and downs—now Israel prevailed, now Amalek—yet 'Joshua discomfited Amalek' (Exod. 17:13). He overcame at last. So with Samson, though he suffered sore defeat, he overcame at the last: 'the dead which he slew at his death were more than they which he slew in his life.' The dying thief, too, was an overcomer; also John Mark, and in a very full manner Paul, whose swansong was, 'I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith' (1 Tim. 4:7).

There was One only Who was a perfect Overcomer from start to finish—He Who could say, 'I overcame, and am set down with My Father in His throne;' and though the conflict is very real and endures to the end, the final victory is assured to every child of God, who 'is kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation' (1 Peter 1:5).

There are two snares, at opposite swings of the pendulum, the first of overrating our enemies, because leaving God out; the second of leaving God out, because underrating our enemies. Into the first the children of Isreal fell, when they heard of the giant sons of Anak and of the cities walled up to heaven, and so feared to enter into the land, and into the second when they persisted in going against the Amorites though warned of God that He was not with them. The first is unbelief and the second presumption. If we look through God at our foes, *they* look like grasshoppers; if we look at our foes, and forget God, *we* feel like grasshoppers.

Evangelist, in the *Pilgrims' Progress*, warns Christian and Faithful as they were about to enter Vanity Fair, 'the crown is before

you and it is an incorruptible one, so run that he may obtain it. Some there be that set out for this crown, and after they have gone far for it, another comes and takes it from them: hold fast therefore that you have, let no man take your crown. You are not yet out of gunshot of the Devil, you have not resisted unto blood, striving against sin . . . Set your face like a flint, you have all power in heaven and earth on your side.' Such words were for true pilgrims, but what about the 'Talkatives,' the 'Byends,' the 'Flatterer' — the 'black man in the light robe.' These men took for granted they were in the way, but they had never entered the narrow gate; can we believe they have no counterparts in the professing church today? Though we believe firmly in the final preservation of the saints, God has not furnished us with a list, and *we* are exhorted to 'give all diligence to make our calling and election sure.'

There may be profession without possession, light without life, head notions without heart convictions, membership even of scripturally ordered churches and no membership of Christ.

A loose professor once said in the writer's hearing, 'A Christian can do anything but be lost;' but this is to turn 'grace' into license. The subsequent course of this poor man only went to show how little he had ever known the 'grace of God in truth.'

There is no contradiction in this: the same lips that spake the words, 'My sheep shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of My hand,' uttered that solemn warning: 'every tree that My heavenly Father hath not planted shall be rooted out.'

And when the Apostle John is speaking of the antichrists of the last hour he adds words which may well make our ears tingle, 'they went out from us, but they were not of us, for if they had been of us they would no doubt have continued with us, but they went out that it might be made manifest that they were not all of us' (1 John 2:19). How solemn, that men, no doubt baptized and received into Christian fellowship, should eventually prove never to have been born again, and be manifested as antichrists!

Every one must be tested; nothing but reality will do for God. It is remarkable in this connection that the nine closing books of the Bible are all of a 'testing' character.

The test of reality in the Hebrews Epistle is, 'not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is.' This goes much further than merely becoming irregular at the meetings (a thing greatly to be avoided), but means, I believe, giving up the very ground of gathering—Christ Himself—in the sense of apostasy. The test of James is works, 'faith without works is dead.' In 1 Peter it seems to be the endurance of suffering; in the second Epistle progress, 'giving all diligence, to add to faith virtue,' etc. John's test in his first Epistle is practical righteousness, while in his second and third it is respectively, 'abiding in the doctrine of Christ,' and 'doing good.' Jude lays down the holding of 'the faith once for all delivered to the saints.' In the Apocalypse the final test is 'overcoming.'

These are heart-searching tests. Can we bear them? No past profession, knowledge of truth, or gifts of utterance can avail to 'save a soul alive,' if the life be characterized by untruthfulness and shady or unclean ways.

Who then, we will now ask, are the Overcomers of the Apocalypse? By many they are viewed as an inner circle of specially advanced believers, pre-eminent above their fellows for holiness and faithfulness. This is indeed the general view. We live in a day of preferential circles, the 'higher life' circles, 'inner circles of the church', etc., which alone will share in the Rapture of the saints and the kingdom. It has been well said that all these 'circles' denote 'a falling from grace', for through grace we are introduced at our conversion into 'the circle of God's favour,' accepted in the Beloved, 'made nigh by the blood.' Would not true spirituality be rather shown by a shrinking even from appearing to claim any higher place of attainment above other Christians? The trouble about these circles is that those who insist upon them, seem sometimes, though perhaps only in appearance, to claim to be 'inside,' and address their brethren, who do not share their views, 'as outside.' In reality these teachers must be, one would judge, the most complacent or the most apprehensive of men.

This idea of preferential circles is to be deprecated for three reasons: first, it tends to foster pride in those who think they are inside; secondly, it encourages sloth and self-deception in those

who are told that, though they may be excluded from the kingdom, they will certainly get to heaven eventually; and thirdly, because it lacks Scriptural authority.

Although the attainments of Christians vary with the individual, all are equally '*in Christ*,' and all should be united in Christian fellowship not only 'ideally' but in practical ways as far as possible.

(Concluded in next issue)

THE GENITIVE CASE OF THE NOUN

There is no case to which more attention ought to be given in the New Testament than to the genitive. There are at least five or six different uses which should be carefully studied, as doctrinal deductions of considerable importance will often be found to depend on the view taken. We have, for instance, a gen. of *possession* as in 2 Thess. 2 : 14 ; of *origin* (Col. 2 : 18) ; of originating *cause* (Col. 1 : 23 ; 1 Thess. 1 : 6) of characterizing *quality* (Gal. 5 : 1) ; of *material* (Phil. 3 : 21) ; of *contents* (1 Thess. 2 : 5) ; of *opposition* (Eph. 6 : 14) ; of *point of view* (Phil. 2 : 30) ; and the general divisions of the gen. *subjecti* and *objecti*, the due distinction between which always tests the accuracy of thought and perspicacity of the interpreter.—BISHOP ELLICOTT.

AN EXPOSITORY STUDY OF ST JOHN'S GOSPEL

F. F. BRUCE, M.A.

II. Jesus reveals Himself to the World (John 1 : 18—12 : 50)

(b) MINISTRY OF JESUS IN GALILEE, JERUSALEM AND SAMARIA (John 2 : 1—4 : 42)

iii. *Nicodemus and the New Birth* (2 : 23—3 : 21)

Ch. 2, v. 23—*Now when He was in Jerusalem at the passover, during the feast, many believed on His name, beholding His signs which He did.*—The last three verses of this chapter probably serve as an introduction to the Nicodemus episode of Ch. 3. It is frequently said that, whereas Jesus in the Synoptic Gospels deprecates the faith that must have a sign to depend on, and indeed refuses to give a sign when asked (cf. Mark 8 : 11 f.), the Jesus of the Fourth Gospel performs signs expressly to produce belief. A passage like the present one shows that the antithesis is by no means so sharp as is often represented. (Compare also John