

# How to Become an Overcomer

## Lesson 1 ... On Being a Forgiver

An overcomer is not the same as being a mere believer in Jesus Christ. In John's message to the Seven Churches, the word was given to the entire Church, but the rewards were reserved for those who overcome. The clear implication is that not all believers would actually overcome.

The difficulty that Christians have had in distinguishing the believers from the overcomers is their simplistic view of divine reward and punishment. It is generally believed that all unbelievers are punished in an obscure "hell," while all believers receive "eternal life." There seems to be a type of divine democracy in this, where all men are treated equally, depending only on whether or not they believe in Jesus Christ.

But Jesus Himself made it clear in Luke 19 that some believers would be rewarded with rulership over five cities (19:19), or ten cities (19:17). This alone shows us that all future rewards are not equal. But this goes beyond the basic reward of immortal life, for these rewards deal with *authority* over others, or other cities. Immortality is immortality, and everyone who receives it will have it equally. But immortality is not the only reward.

Then, too, there is the little-understood question of WHEN a person will receive this reward of immortality. By this, I do not mean to enter the debate about whether a person receives immortality at the moment of his death or later in the resurrection. The more important question is whether he is raised in the *first* resurrection or the *second*. The first resurrection consists of those who are called to positions of authority, for Rev. 20:4-6 says,

**<sup>4</sup> ... and they came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years. <sup>5</sup> The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were completed. This is the first resurrection. <sup>6</sup> Blessed and holy is the one who has part in the first resurrection; over these the second death has no power, but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with Him for a thousand years.**

The first resurrection will not include everyone, for it speaks of "the rest of the dead" not coming to life until a thousand years later. This makes it a limited resurrection. The second resurrection, however, includes ALL the dead—that is, the rest of the dead (Rev. 20:5). Of this resurrection Jesus said in John 5:28, 29,

**<sup>28</sup> Do not marvel at this; for an hour is coming in which all who are in the tombs shall hear His voice, <sup>29</sup> and shall come forth; those who did the good deeds to a resurrection of life, those who committed the evil deeds to a resurrection of judgment.**

This resurrection of which Jesus spoke was the second, in which "*all who are in the tombs*" are raised to life. In verse 29 Jesus makes it clear that this resurrection will include both believers and unbelievers, for some will receive "life," while others will receive "judgment." (Paul confirms this in Acts 24:15.)

We can only conclude, then, that the first resurrection will include ONLY believers, but NOT ALL believers. The second resurrection will include both believers and unbelievers, who will receive their respective rewards (life or judgment) at the same time. This is consistent with what Jesus taught in Luke 12:46, where He says that some of God's "servants" will receive their reward "with" (at the same time as) the unbelievers.

This is also confirmed by Moses in the law. The dead are to be raised "at the last trumpet" (1 Cor.

15:52; 1 Thess. 4:16). Moses prophesied that the congregation (i.e., “Church”) was to be summoned before God by the blowing of *two* silver trumpets (Num. 10:3). But only *one* trumpet was blown to summon the rulers of the people—that is, those in positions of authority or rule. Since “the last trumpet” uses the singular term, we can see that Paul was speaking of the first resurrection that would summon only the rulers of the people—that is, the overcomers. This is the “better resurrection” (Heb. 11:35) that the men of faith sought to attain.

The distinction between the two resurrections raises the question of what it takes to be an overcomer. Must a person be beheaded, as a literal reading of Rev. 20:4 would seem to indicate? Must a person suffer martyrdom, as so many of the men of faith did who are listed in Hebrews 11?

The simple answer is this: overcomers must indeed lose their heads, but not necessarily their physical heads. God is more concerned with replacing our minds with the mind of Christ than He is with physical beheadings. Secondly, in the list of overcomers in Hebrews 11, it is primarily their *faith* that commends them, not their death. Yet they had to love God more than their own lives. The list in Hebrews 11 includes (by name) only two men who were actually martyred—Abel and Samson. Neither was beheaded, and the rest died normal deaths. Yet all these obtained “a better resurrection.”

So it must be with those who follow in their footsteps.

What, then, does it take to be an overcomer? What must we do to obtain that “better resurrection” and become “ruler” in God’s Kingdom? There are four main things that are clearly taught in the Scripture. There are, no doubt, more than these, but if a person fulfills these four, there is little doubt that he will fulfill all other requirements as well.

In Matthew 18:21, 22 we read,

**<sup>21</sup> Then Peter came and said to Him, Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me and I forgive him? Up to seven times? <sup>22</sup> Jesus said to him, I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven.**

Seventy times seven equals 490. This was not a random number. It is equal to the “seventy weeks of Daniel” (Dan. 9:24). It is also 10 Jubilees (49 x 10). The number 490 is prominent, because it is a forgiveness cycle. Every year on the Day of Atonement, God forgave the nation, covering its sin by the blood of the goat.

Thus, when Jesus said to forgive “seventy times seven,” He spoke a hidden truth of judgment in Bible prophecy. God was obligated to forgive the nation 490 times—once each year on the Day of Atonement. From the beginning of Daniel’s 70 weeks (458 B.C.) when Judah’s Jubilee calendar was divinely reinstated, God once again forgave the nation (and the world) each year for the next 490 years. The final year fell in 33 A.D., and at this point God settled the accounts. He foreclosed on the debt, but sent Jesus to pay it in full on the Cross. Hence, He reconciled the world to Himself by paying its debt for sin.

Jesus illustrated his statement about forgiving 490 times by illustrating it with a parable. He said this immediately after telling Peter to forgive 490 times, and not just seven times. In Matt. 18:23-35 we read,

**<sup>23</sup> For this reason the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a certain king who wished to settle accounts with his slaves. <sup>24</sup> And when he had begun to settle them, there was brought to him one who owed him ten thousand talents.**

A “talent” of gold in those days was 131 pounds (Troy) of gold. A “talent” of silver was 117 pounds (Troy). Ten thousand “talents” of either gold or silver represented a huge debt that was impossible to repay. In the parable, the debtor appealed for grace, and the king forgave the whole debt. But the

former debtor later refused to forgive the small debt that his neighbor owed him. When the king heard about it, he summoned the ex-debtor. Verses 32-35 tell us,

**32 Then summoning him, his lord said to him, You wicked slave, I forgave you all that debt because you entreated me. 33 Should you not also have had mercy on your fellow slave, even as I had mercy on you? 34 And his lord, moved with anger, handed him over to the torturers** [Imprisonment was called in the Roman law books, *cruciatus corporis*, “crucifying the flesh or body.”] **until he should repay all that was owed him.**

Jesus then summed up the parable with a moral to the story:

**35 So shall My heavenly Father also do to you, if each of you does not forgive his brother from your heart.**

Thus, we see that this parable is not really about forgiving monetary debts, but about all transgressions that men do against us. We are to follow Jesus’ example in forgiving those who trespass against us. In the Lord’s Prayer as recorded in Matt. 6:12, we read, “*And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.*” In Luke 11:4, it reads this way:

**4 And forgive us our sins, for we ourselves also forgive everyone who is indebted to us.**

In the Bible, sin is reckoned as a debt. If a man sins against another, he is said to be indebted to him. And so Jesus’ parables about monetary debts are really about the art of forgiveness. Jesus Himself, of course, was ready to lead the way in showing us the extent to which a person was to forgive, saying at the cross, “*Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do*” (Luke 23:34).

Christians often have a problem forgiving others who have offended them. Some have truly been brutalized by others. Whether they have been wounded by a simple comment or physical abuse is not the issue here. Nor is it our purpose in this writing to try to remedy any emotional or physical traumas that Christians have experienced. It is doubtful if anyone reading these few lines has experienced the kind of abuse that Jesus received when He went to the Cross. In whatever way we have been abused, He was abused more. And yet He was able to forgive.

Some people have been called to forgive more than others, depending upon their circumstances. Many in the early Church suffered horrible deaths at the hands of Roman torturers, gladiators, and lions. Others were burned alive and even slowly roasted over a bed of hot coals. Whatever circumstance God has put in our lives is an obstacle to being an overcomer. The obstacle is removed by the power of forgiveness and nothing else.

In fact, an overcomer is one who overcomes something. Without something to overcome, how can he be an overcomer? The only way one can exercise the power of forgiveness is to have something to forgive. To have something to forgive, one must be a victim of some sort of sin. No one is called to forgive an act of kindness. In fact, in biblical law, only the victim has the right to forgive. The biblical judge cannot forgive a sin committed against someone else. He has the power only to determine how much debt is owed to the victim. The victim, then, has the right to demand all of what is owed to him, part of it, or he may forgive the entire debt. That is his right.

It is not that a person must always forgive a debt that is owed to him. He should be led by the Spirit in this matter. To automatically demand payment for all debt to the last penny is to be legalistic. One must go beyond demanding one’s rights. One must pray to know the mind of God in each situation and to know what is best for the sinner (debtor). Perhaps it is best to teach him the discipline of working off the debt in order that he may repent and learn not to victimize others in the future. Or it may be in his best interest under God to cancel all or part of the debt.

Whatever the circumstance, this is where our righteousness must exceed that of the scribes and Pharisees (Matt. 5:20). A legalistic person is unable to forgive until the last penny has been repaid—

and even then, he will never forget! Yet the other extreme is to think that every sin must be forgiven regardless of whether the sinner repents or not. In the parable of Matt. 18, God was more than willing to forgive the sinner; but when the debtor himself refused to forgive a debt, his own forgiveness was revoked. Why? Because God was judging him by his own standard of measure.

This is the law that Jesus mentioned in Matt. 7:1, 2,

**<sup>1</sup> Do not judge lest you be judged. <sup>2</sup> For in the way you judge, you will be judged; and by your standard of measure, it will be measured to you.**

Likewise, in the law it was a sin to charge interest to a brother—that is, a fellow citizen of the Kingdom (Deut. 23:19). However, the next verse tells us it was lawful to charge interest to a foreigner—that is, one who believed in a different set of laws and who saw nothing wrong with charging interest on loans. He could be treated according to his own standard of measure.

In general, this is the principle of grace and blessings being given to those who are citizens of God's Kingdom, subject to His moral standards. But to those who reject God's moral standards, they may be treated according to the way they normally treat others. Thus, the debtor in Matt. 18 did not deserve the blessings of God's law and was treated according to his own standard of measure.

This principle has often been abused by religious groups who are not members of their particular organization or denomination. Some refer to non-members as “gentiles” in order to justify stealing their property or even doing violence to them. The balance here is to see that anyone who is justified by faith in Jesus Christ, who believes that He was the Sacrifice for sin, and that He rose from the dead for our justification is a citizen of the Kingdom. It has nothing to do with race or joining a religion or denomination.

There are laws against partiality in judgment. There are laws against oppressing foreigners—even unbelievers. These laws will balance the application of this double standard on usury and limit its application properly.

In Matthew 18 we thus learn the limits of forgiveness as well. Forgiveness is applicable on two levels: personal and judicial. On the personal side, one should forgive and not carry grudges. Grudges are like debt notes, and they cause people to be negative. This can even cause health problems.

Judicially speaking, the best way to learn how and when to forgive is through our children. When our child does something wrong, how do we judge him? If we simply forgive the offense without holding him accountable in any way, we will soon teach him that it is acceptable to steal or hurt others. In later life he may easily become a criminal.

On the other hand, if he is overly punished, or if forgiveness is withheld from him even after he has made things right, he will grow up feeling bitter and angry with others. In both cases, it is a reaction to injustice. Children rebel against injustice and hypocrisy, which is rooted in partiality and double standards. So we must learn to forgive and even be quick to forgive—yet we must also learn that when dealing with those who are physically, mentally, or spiritually immature, it might be in their best long-term interest to use some discipline to bring them to repentance before extending forgiveness.

I believe that this is an underlying principle in Matthew 18. The debtor needed discipline, and so forgiveness was withheld from him until he paid the last penny. Though the parable ends on that note, we should also keep in mind that the law provided for a Jubilee—the cancellation of all debt at the end of 49 years. In other words, it should be understood that the debtor in the parable would ultimately be forgiven of his debt, even if some the debt were still unpaid.

Jesus, the Lamb of God, has indeed paid for the sin of the whole world. This establishes the fact that

God will save all mankind and puts the responsibility upon Him to do this. However, the way in which He does this is our present question. We see from Matt. 18 that He does not forgive everyone regardless of their actions. Those who have no faith in His Sacrifice will be held accountable until the great Creation Jubilee at the end of time. Those who do have faith in Him are citizens of the Kingdom and will obtain immortality at the general resurrection of the dead. But the priests of the Kingdom (overcomers) will inherit immortality in the first resurrection and will rule with Him in the Kingdom (Rev. 20:4-6).

The moral of the parable of the debtor was not to define the difference between a believer and an unbeliever. It was to define the difference between a regular believer and an overcomer. The forgiven debtor had the lawful right to obtain the small debt that his neighbor owed him. Nowhere in the parable is that right abrogated. But likewise, the king had the right to extract the huge debt from the debtor. And so the king treated the first debtor according to his own standard of measure. If he could not forgive the small debt of his neighbor, then neither would the king forgive the larger debt.

So let me explain that this parable does not address the question of our being “saved,” or “justified by faith.” It deals with being an overcomer. Justification is pictured in Israel’s festival called Passover, where one is justified by the blood of the lamb. This parable, however, deals with another of Israel’s festivals called the Jubilee, which occurred about six months after Passover.

The Jubilee was a day in which all debts were forgiven every 49 years. It preceded the great Feast of Booths (Tabernacles), which pictures the time when we are clothed with immortality (2 Cor. 5:1-4). At the Feast of Booths in ancient times, the people left their houses and built “booths” made of living tree branches. It resembled a week-long camp-out. This was prophetic of the day the overcomers leave the present mortal “house” and dwell in a house not made with hands that is currently reserved for us in heaven.

And so, Jesus’ parable of the debtor gives us the key to understanding how to be an overcomer, and not merely a believer. Being a believer means placing one’s faith in Jesus Christ. Being an overcomer (in the parable) means being a forgiver. This is one of the primary requirements to inheriting the first resurrection as an overcomer. Without having the ability to forgive, no one will be placed in a position of leadership to rule in God’s Kingdom. After all, ask yourself this question: Would YOU want an unforgiving judge or ruler placed in authority over you? No, and neither will God do this. Just because a person is a Christian believer does not make him fit to rule God’s Kingdom.

## **Lesson 2 ...On Being Obedient**

An overcomer is one who has learned to be God’s obedient servant. One must be a servant before one can be a true son, for even sons must learn obedience as servants while they are yet minors (Gal. 4:1). One mark of an immature Christian is one who expects the privileges of a son before coming to maturity. They think they are sons just because they have been “born again” into the family of God. But they do not realize that being in God’s family requires Christian growth to learn responsibility, so that they will know how to use authority wisely with the mind of Christ.

In ancient times Israel celebrated three main festivals, each of which has meaning to us today. The three were: Passover, Pentecost, and Booths (or Tabernacles). Passover celebrated the day God delivered Israel from Egypt. It was the day Moses began to lead the Israelites to the Promised Land. After crossing the Red Sea, Moses led them to a place called Mount Sinai, where God gave them the Ten Commandments. That day came to be celebrated as the feast of Pentecost.

A year after God gave them the law, Israel left Mount Sinai and began moving toward the land of Canaan, which God had promised as their inheritance. When the people got there, they sent twelve

men to spy out the land. They returned after 40 days and gave their report. The land was very productive, they said, but it was already inhabited by too many people, some of whom were giants. The people's faith melted, and they did not believe God could help them conquer the land. So God made them return to the wilderness for another 38 years before allowing them to enter the land under Joshua.

The point is that if Israel had inherited the land at their appointed time, they would have entered the land on the first day of the Feast of Booths. Instead, they refused, and that generation all died in the wilderness without receiving their inheritance. Even so, they were to commemorate that day by celebrating the Feast of Booths every year.

## The Meaning to Us

The meaning for us is this: We ourselves were saved from our own bondage by Jesus' death on the Cross. He died at the Feast of Passover to bring the Church to its divine inheritance, its "Promised Land." But this was only the beginning of the journey. Seven weeks later on the day of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit was given to the Church (Acts 2). This was the true fulfillment of Pentecost, even as Jesus' death on the Cross was the true fulfillment of Passover.

But Pentecost was not the final feast to be fulfilled. The third great festival was the Feast of Booths, representing the inheritance, our "Promised Land." This does not refer to a person "going to heaven." Heaven is not our inheritance. Our inheritance is the glorified body, the "tabernacle" that will clothe us in immortality (2 Cor. 5:1-4).

You see, we lost that immortal body when Adam sinned long ago. The body is made of the dust of the ground. It is our "land inheritance." God's intention was to display His glory in the earth as it is in heaven. His purpose will not be fulfilled until His glory covers the earth as the waters cover the sea (Hab. 2:14). His intention is not to destroy this "dust" but to fill it with His glory. This was illustrated and proven by Jesus Himself when He was transfigured in the mount (Matt. 17:1-5).

An overcomer is one who makes the journey all the way from "Egypt" to the "Promised Land." To do this, he must first leave Egypt. That is, he experiences *Passover* by placing his faith in Jesus Christ, the "Lamb of God" (John 1:29). In the New Testament, this is called "Justification" (Rom. 4:25).

Secondly, he experiences *Pentecost* by being filled with the Holy Spirit. This is a separate experience that begins the process called "Sanctification" (1 Cor. 1:30). This means we are set apart for divine service, and that we begin learning obedience by being led by the Holy Spirit. As a person learns to be led by the Spirit, he learns to hear and obey the voice of God.

If he qualifies as a faithful servant, then he is eligible for the third and final festival, *Booths*, by which he is clothed with the robe of immortality. Every believer will receive this reward eventually, but not everyone will do so at the first resurrection. Most will have to await the second resurrection described in part one: *On Being a Forgiver*. The simple fact is that the Church of the Pentecostal Age in the past 2,000 years has followed the example of the Israelite "Church in the wilderness" (Acts 7:38) under Moses.

## Law and Obedience

Justification is by faith alone. But once a person has been justified, saved, born again—whatever one prefers to call it—then God begins to teach the believer obedience. No one is justified by the law—that is, by obedience to the law. But neither is a believer sanctified apart from the law. A true Pentecostal is not lawless but *lawful*.

When I use the term “law,” I refer to any command that God gives us, whether part of the written record of Scripture or by a direct leading of the Holy Spirit. Anything that God says to do is a law, for God requires obedience to all of His commands.

Israel was “saved” or “justified by faith” when they left Egypt. That is, they heeded the call and had faith that God would bring them out of bondage and into the inheritance that He had promised them. This preceded the law by about fifty days. This was to show us that justification is distinct from the law and from sanctification. Romans 3:28 says,

**<sup>28</sup> For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from works of the law.**

Once Paul established that justification is not by the law, then in Romans 6 he began to teach the principles of sanctification. Romans 6:1, 2 says,

**<sup>1</sup> What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace might abound? <sup>2</sup> May it never be! How shall we who died to sin still live in it?**

“Sin is the transgression of the law,” John says in 1 John 3:4 (KJV). More literally, the verse reads, “sin is lawlessness” (NASB). The Greek word is *anomia*. It comes from the Greek word *nomos*, “law.” The law defines sin for us. Murder is a sin because the law defines it so in Exodus 20:13. Adultery is a sin because the law defines it so in Exodus 20:14. Theft is a sin because the law defines it so in Exodus 20:15.

The Apostle Paul tells us in Romans 3:20, “*through the law comes the knowledge of sin.*” He says also in Romans 7:7,

**<sup>7</sup> I would not have come to know sin except through the law; for I would not have known about coveting if the law had not said, You shall not covet.**

It is the same in today’s society. Our government has laws which define “sin” as they see it. If there were no law against theft or murder, then even the most brilliant judge could not convict any man of theft or murder. This is why men pass laws. They are the standard of measure in every court to decide guilt or innocence.

So it is with God’s Kingdom. The standard of measure for Christian conduct is the divine law. To break one of His laws is to be a sinner. And we know that all men have broken the law, for Romans 3:19 and 23 say,

**<sup>19</sup> Now we know that whatever the law says, it speaks to those who are under the law, that every mouth may be closed, and all the world may become accountable to God . . . <sup>20</sup> for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.**

Because all men have sinned, there is no way for anyone to be justified by the law, for the law can only condemn the guilty. But Jesus came and paid the debt for the sin of the whole world in order that we might be justified. The law does not care who pays the debt, as long as it is paid. Jesus satisfied the full demand of the law, and so the law no longer has grounds to condemn us or to force us to pay the debt for our sin.

Yet in doing this, Jesus did not put away the law. If He had put away the law, He would not have needed to pay its penalty. He simply could have repealed the law. But He did not do this, for the Apostle Paul says in Romans 3:31,

**<sup>31</sup> Do we then nullify the law through faith? May it never be! On the contrary, we establish the law.**

In America and every other nation, men are constantly changing their laws. We used to have laws outlawing adultery and homosexual relations. Those laws have now been put away. This means that

no one can be prosecuted in a court of law if they do these things. So it is with God's law. Some Christians teach that God put away His law, and not just a few of the laws, but *the entire law*. If that were the case, then all human activity would be lawful in the eyes of God. There would be no such thing as sin. God would have no right to judge any man or nation for disobedience, for nothing could be defined as disobedience or sin. Romans 4:15 says, "***where there is no law, neither is there violation.***"

Is there sin in the world? Only if the law is still in effect. Will God judge the world at the Great White Throne? Only if there is a law by which He may judge.

This does not mean that laws cannot change. They do change. There are moral laws, of course, that remain unaltered. But there are certain forms of the law that change, and there are changes in administration and authorities that change. For example, in the Old Testament, God required that men bring sacrifices to the temple. In the New Testament, Jesus came to be the final Sacrifice for all time that would never have to be repeated. Likewise, in the Old Testament, the priestly authority was restricted to the portion of Levites that were descended directly from Aaron, Moses' brother. But in the New Testament Jesus came through a different order of priesthood called the Order of Melchizedek (Heb. 5:6) that did not require physical descent from Aaron. Instead, it required spiritual descent from Jesus Christ, the continuing High Priest of that Order.

So yes, certain things in the law were changed. But murder is still a sin, theft is still a sin, and adultery is still a sin. God did not change His mind on those moral issues, nor did He suddenly legalize them when Jesus died on the Cross.

## **Pentecost and Obedience**

Romans 10:17 tells us that "*faith comes by hearing.*" In the Hebrew language of the Old Testament, the word *shema* can mean either "to hear" or "to obey." We can translate it either way and still be correct. In other words, the biblical concept of hearing God cannot be separated from obedience to what one has heard. If a person claims to have heard God speak, but does not obey His voice, then that person has not really heard at all. This is what the Apostle James meant when he wrote in James 2:17 and 24,

**<sup>17</sup> Even so faith, if it has no works, is dead, being by itself. . . <sup>24</sup> You see that a man is justified by works, and not by faith alone.**

This has confused many people, who think that the Apostle James was contradicting the Apostle Paul (Rom. 3:28 to 4:5). But this is not the case. Both were correct. Paul was correct in separating justification from sanctification—that is, Passover from Pentecost. But James was correct in putting works with faith—that is, obedience with hearing.

Paul's teaching tells us that Passover and Pentecost are two different festivals that commemorate two different occasions. Israel came out of Egypt prior to receiving the law at Mount Sinai. Hence, justification is by faith, apart from obedience to the law.

James' teaching tells us that on the feast of Passover, Israel received the revelation that they were to kill a lamb and put the blood on the door posts and lintels of their houses. Hearing that word was not enough. They had to act upon it in order to save their first born sons from death. Thus, obedience is the result of faith, and without obedience, there is no genuine faith at all.

If you have been justified by faith and believe that Jesus Christ died for your sins and rose again for your justification having the Holy Spirit within speaking in tongues as evidence, then you have begun your journey to the Promised Land. You have "left Egypt," the place where you were in bondage to your sin. You are now part of the "congregation" (Church), even as those who left Egypt on Passover were part of the Church in the wilderness (Acts 7:38). This means you are now a



citizen of the Kingdom. The citizens under Moses were allowed to enter the outer court of the Tabernacle.

There were three parts in the Tabernacle of Moses: the outer court, the Holy Place, and the Most Holy Place. When considering ourselves to be the temple of God, these three parts of the Tabernacle correspond to body, soul, and spirit. But we may also view these three parts in terms of our place in the Kingdom: Citizen, Priest, and body of the High Priest. (Today we are of a Melchizedek priesthood, not a Levitical priesthood.)

Once you have left Egypt and become a citizen of the Kingdom, you are eligible to go to “Mount Sinai” to experience Pentecost. This is sometimes referred to as a “second work of grace” in our lives. A true Pentecostal is one who enters the Holy Place of the Tabernacle. Only the priests could enter the Holy Place. Thus, a true Pentecostal is more than a mere CITIZEN of the Kingdom. He is also a PRIEST of the Kingdom.

The Old Testament pattern for this is seen in the fact that those of the tribe of Levi were citizens of the Kingdom, but the descendants of Aaron were priests.

Pentecost is the feast of the giving of the law. It celebrates the day that God gave Israel the Ten Commandments at Mount Sinai in Exodus 20. On that occasion, God spoke, and the people all heard the voice of God. Deut. 4:12 says,

**12 Then the Lord spoke to you from the midst of the fire; you heard the sound of words, but you saw no form—only a voice.**

Israel was too fearful at that time to hear more than just the Ten Commandments. They begged Moses to tell God to stop speaking to them directly (Ex. 20:18-21). They preferred instead to let Moses tell them what God said—that is, to hear God indirectly through a human agent. Hebrews 12:19 refers to that day, saying,

**19 and to the blast of a trumpet and the sound of words which sound was such that those who heard begged that no further word should be spoken to them.**

That day Israel set a terrible precedent by refusing to hear the voice of God directly for themselves. They wanted a man, a professional preacher, to hear God and then tell them what He said. They wanted an indirect relationship with God. So God granted their request. Instead of writing His law on their heart by His voice, He gave them the law on tablets of stone. If the people wanted to hear the voice of God, they had to read the tablets which had no life. They did not understand that “*faith comes by hearing*” (Rom. 10:17), and that “*without faith, it is impossible to please Him*” (Heb. 11:6).

One can certainly receive faith by reading stone tablets (or the written word, which we call the Bible). But this can only happen through the action of the Holy Spirit. We cannot bypass that direct voice of God and still hope to see our faith grow. We must learn to hear God whether we are reading the Word, or listening to a preacher, or observing the signs of the times. The externals in and of themselves will not produce faith in us. Faith comes when we see God and hear His voice in those externals.

God desires a personal and direct relationship with each of us. This is what separates us from those worshipping “the unknown god.” God is not content to throw Scripture at us and then leave us to figure out how to live by it. He operates in us by His Spirit each moment of the day, and if we will but listen, we can be guided always by that silent, inner voice.

This is Pentecost. Unfortunately, Israel set a pattern in Exodus 20 that rejected the true meaning of Pentecost. They did all hear the Ten Commandments, and so we see that even today that this portion of the law is known in the Church. But the rest of the law was given to Israel only indirectly, for

Moses was the only one who heard the rest of the law when he ascended the mount in Exodus 20:21. It is unfortunate that even in the Church today, the rest of the law remains concealed from most of the people. They do not study it, for it is not a revelation to them. There is a veil over their eyes that is not removed except by the revelation of the Holy Spirit, who alone can bring this Scripture to life.

In Acts 2 the veil was removed from the eyes of the 120 disciples in the upper room. They overcame the effects of the decision of their forefathers. The 120 decided that they DID want to hear the rest of the revelation of God. They were not satisfied with what they had heard in times past. They were not satisfied with partial seeing and partial hearing. They wanted Jesus to heal their partial blindness, even as Jesus healed the man born blind in the ninth chapter of John.

## Miracles and Lawlessness

Most Christians have read Jesus' "Sermon on the Mount" more than once. It is recorded in Matthew 5-7. Toward the end of this passage, He speaks of knowing the difference between true and false prophets by their "fruit." Then it says in Matt. 7:21-23,

**<sup>21</sup> Not everyone who says to Me, Lord, Lord, will enter the kingdom of heaven; but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven. <sup>22</sup> Many will say to Me in that day, Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name perform many miracles? <sup>23</sup> And then I will declare to them, I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness.**

The Greek word translated "lawlessness" is *anomia*. The King James Version renders it "iniquity," which is technically accurate but does not adequately convey to most people the concept of despising God's law. The NASB (above) has the better rendering.

In this passage Jesus was talking about believers. In fact, He was talking about believers who could even perform miracles. They are even people who have the Holy Spirit to some extent, for we read in 1 Cor. 12:3, "*no one can say Jesus is Lord except by the Holy Spirit.*" Jesus was apparently not nearly as impressed by miracles as other men are. Miracles are good and certainly very helpful, but they are never said to be a mark of an overcomer. So if you have never performed a miracle, do not be discouraged in your quest to be an overcomer. This is not a lesson in miracle-working; it is a lesson in simple obedience as led by the Holy Spirit.

In Num. 20:11 Moses struck the rock, and a miracle happened. Water came out of the rock for the Israelites. But God had not told Moses to strike the rock—not on this occasion. God told him in verse 8 to *speak* to the rock. Moses was disobedient and should have known better, and so he was not allowed to enter the Promised Land.

This is a good example of how miracles may be done in disobedience to God. Jesus foresaw the day when "many" would say, "Lord, Lord, have we not done many miracles in Your name?" Jesus did not dispute their claim. But miracles do not determine who is and who is not an overcomer. God is more interested in obedience than in miracles.

## The Tares and the Wheat

In Jesus' parable of the tares in the wheat, Jesus again uses the term *anomia*, saying in Matt. 13:41,

**<sup>41</sup> The Son of Man will send forth His angels, and they will gather out of His kingdom all stumbling blocks, and those who commit lawlessness <sup>42</sup> and will cast them into the furnace of fire; in that place there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.**

Will the lawless be judged by "fire"? Yes, that is what it says, but I do not believe that this is a

literal fire that tortures people. There we show that the “fire” is the “fiery law” that God gave to Israel (Deut. 33:2). It represents the divine judgment of the law. The law never prescribed torture for any sin. For example, the “fire” applied to a thief was that he would have to pay restitution (Ex. 22:1-4).

There are two kinds of lawless people: believers and unbelievers. Both will be judged according to the divine law. Paul says of believers in 1 Cor. 3:11-15,

**<sup>11</sup> For no man can lay a foundation other than the one which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. <sup>12</sup> Now if any man builds upon the foundation [Christ] with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, <sup>13</sup> each man’s work will become evident; for the day will show it, because it is to be revealed by FIRE; and the FIRE itself will test the quality of each man’s work.**

Notice here that Paul was speaking of those who were building upon the Foundation which is Christ. If Christ is already laid as the foundation in their lives, then they are Christians. What Christians do AFTER they have received Christ is pictured by the gold, silver, and precious stones—if they have done things in obedience and by faith. But if they have built with wood, hay, or straw, these things picture those works of the flesh (lawless acts) that can and will be burned by the fire of God in that day.

**<sup>14</sup> If any man’s work which he has built upon it remains, he shall receive a reward. <sup>15</sup> If any man’s work be burned up, he shall suffer loss; but he himself shall be saved, yet so as through fire.**

Clearly, this indicates that believers will be tested by fire in some manner. Their works will be judged according to the measure of the fiery law. All lawless works will be consumed in the fire, for they are the wood, hay, and straw.

So getting back to the parable of the tares and the wheat in Matthew 13, Jesus says that those who “commit lawlessness” are tares—that is, look-alike believers whose fruit is poisonous, not nourishing. At first, tares and wheat look the same. It is only toward harvest that the difference becomes apparent, for the wheat becomes heavy with grain and bows its head as if in humility. The tares produce small, light seed that remains unbowed and whose seed is poisonous. We will truly know them by their fruit.

## **Legalism is Lawlessness**

Whenever we say that Christians ought to be *lawful*, there are always some who think this means we must be *legalistic*. The scribes and Pharisees were legalistic, and we do not advocate being like them. In their scrupulousness to follow the law, they actually broke it.

Many examples are given in Matthew 5. Legalism is where a person reads the law that says, “*Thou shalt not murder*,” but they think it is okay to hate their neighbor (Matt. 5:21, 22). Legalism is where a person reads the law that says, “*an eye for an eye*,” and then they insist that it is their sacred duty to exact vengeance in full to all those who offend them (Matt. 38-42). Legalism is where a person reads in the law, “*Thou shalt love thy neighbor*,” and then adds his own tradition, “and hate thine enemy.” Legalism is where a person narrowly defines “neighbor” so that they do not have to love those that they want to hate.

This is why Jesus preceded all of these examples by saying that our righteousness must *exceed* that of the Pharisees (Matt. 5:20). In other words, we have to do a better job of interpreting and applying the law than they did. Many of their opinions destroyed the law. In Mark 7:7-9 Jesus said to them,

**<sup>7</sup> But in vain do they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the precepts of men. <sup>8</sup> Neglecting the commandment of God, you hold to the tradition of men. <sup>9</sup> He was also saying to them, You**

**nicely set aside the commandment of God in order to keep your tradition. . . <sup>13</sup> thus invalidating the word of God by your tradition which you have handed down.**

It is most unfortunate that men interpret and apply the law by their carnal mind and understanding, instead of letting the Holy Spirit do this for them. This was the problem with the scribes and Pharisees in Jesus' day, as Jesus said in Matt. 23:27, 28,

**<sup>27</sup> Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs which on the outside appear beautiful, but inside they are full of dead men's bones and all uncleanness. <sup>28</sup> Even so you too outwardly appear righteous to men, but inwardly you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness [anomia].**

The problem has persisted to the present. When men do this, they become legalistic, and they cause others to cast aside the law entirely. In doing this, they are no longer able to live by EVERY word that has come from the mouth of God (Matt. 4:4). It is the job of the overcomer to pray to see the difference between lawfulness and legalism, lest they become lawless.

A legalist looks for loopholes in the law in order to justify his sin. He is not interested in doing the will of God, but wants to sin with immunity. The law does have gaps in the revelation, for if God had given legislation about every action, the volumes would have been endless. An example is found in the law of Passover. The law said that every man was to celebrate the feast. But it also said that one who was unclean could NOT keep the feast.

It so happened that a man died, and his sons buried him (Num. 9). In touching the dead body, they were rendered unclean and were not able to keep the Passover. So they came to Moses to ask him what to do in such a case. Moses recognized that God had not yet ruled on such cases, so he went to God to get a further revelation about this. God told him that if they could not keep the Passover in the first month, they were to keep it in the second month on the same day of the month.

This ruling was a tremendous revelation, because it shows us that there is a second opportunity to be justified by faith in the blood of the Lamb. Many have scorned the idea of "second chancism," insisting that one can be justified only in this present life time. But the law manifests the heart of God in this matter. If a person is "unclean" in this age, there is a second opportunity (not "chance") for him to be justified in the age to come.

A legalist interprets the Bible according to the idol of his own heart—that is, his own desire and understanding, rather than by the revelation of the Holy Spirit. He either looks for loopholes in the law to justify his sin, or he adds his own traditions to the law that make the law a heavy burden to the people. Overcomers are those whose desire is to know the mind of God, rather than to establish their own desire or point of view. They genuinely want to be obedient, rather than to dictate their wishes to God.

## **The Leading of the Holy Spirit**

It has always been the desire of God to lead us by the direct action of the Holy Spirit. This was pictured under Moses by the pillar of fire by night and the pillar of cloud by day which led Israel in the wilderness. However, men are carnally minded and seem to have difficulty hearing the voice of God. Some have rebellious hearts that refuse to hear, and others have much heart idolatry that prevents them from hearing.

For this reason, God has given the law on external tablets (whether on stone or paper is not the issue). God prefers to write the law on our hearts by the spoken word, for that internalizes the word and makes it part of our very nature. But few seem to be able to hear that word, and so we have been given a written record of the word. Men study this written word either with the carnal mind or

by the spiritual mind with differing results.

The Holy Spirit was not given as a better *alternative* to the law, or as a law substitute. The Holy Spirit was given so that we could know the mind of God every time He speaks. The things that were written in the past were largely hidden from men, and these things could only be revealed by the direct action of the Holy Spirit. In other words, the Holy Spirit is the illuminator of the law, the One who gives us understanding. This was what Jesus did personally while He walked with the disciples. But when He left them bodily, the Holy Spirit became His substitute in this way. John 14:25, 26 says,

**<sup>25</sup> These things I have spoken to you, while abiding with you. <sup>26</sup> But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I said to you.**

Hence, the Holy Spirit is not a law substitute, but a Jesus substitute. Understanding this, we will not fall into either trap—legalism or lawlessness. Instead, we will learn to follow the leading of the Holy Spirit, who will never tell us to violate the law of God. The Spirit may lead us to violate men’s traditions—their understanding of the law—but not the law as God intended for it to be understood from the beginning.

It has been said that Jesus often violated the divine law. The Pharisees believed this, and they crucified Him on a charge of blasphemy for claiming to be the Messiah. They could find no other charge against Him. Pontius Pilate found the Lamb of God to be without blemish, saying, ***“I find no guilt in Him”*** (John 19:4). The Passover lambs were required to be without blemish (Ex. 12:5). Jesus fulfilled that law. So how can anyone say that He violated the law? If He were guilty of sin, He would not have qualified as the Lamb of God to take away our sin. Sin is lawlessness (1 John 3:4).

## **The Meaning of Obedience**

Most Christians understand that God wants them to be obedient. Some mistakenly make obedience a prerequisite for salvation (justification), and this puts them under the bondage of trying to be good enough to merit salvation. That view is held by those who do not know the difference between Passover and Pentecost. Passover brings us justification by faith, apart from works (Rom. 3:28). Pentecost, however, brings us into obedience and cannot be separated from our works.

In Pentecost, we are led by the Spirit to do whatever God leads us (or tells us) to do each day. That is the meaning of obedience. It directly affects everything we do. If a person claims to be filled with the Spirit, but refuses to be obedient, he is not a true Pentecostal. 2 Cor. 10:5 says that we conduct spiritual warfare for this purpose:

**<sup>5</sup> We are destroying speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God, and we are taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ.**

The Apostle Peter confirms this, saying in 1 Peter 1:14, 15,

**<sup>14</sup> As obedient children, do not be conformed to the former lusts which were yours in your ignorance, <sup>15</sup> but like the Holy One who called you, be holy yourselves also in all your behavior.**

We need not belabor this point, since most people understand that obedience is a virtue. As I see it, the more important problem is that people have dissociated obedience from the law. It is not that the first five books of Moses represent the *entire* law. It is not. The law is the entire written word, along with every spoken word that God has ever said to men on an individual basis. Whatever God tells men to do is a law, simply because it requires obedience. The only qualifier to this is that men must

also pray to know the will of God in every command. If we try to obey according to our carnal understanding, we are sure to fail regardless of our “good intentions.”

### Lesson 3 ... On Unconditional Love

An overcomer is one who knows how to love unconditionally. There is more than one kind of love—or more accurately, there is more than one *level* of love. The level of love that we exhibit depends fully upon our ability to love. Our ability to love depends upon our level of maturity. Our level of maturity manifests our progression from Egypt to the Promised Land.

God has children. These children are not born as mature adults. They are born as spiritual babies who are in need of growth and learning. We would not allow a two-year-old child to drive a car on the Los Angeles freeway. Nor would we elect a ten-year-old to be president of the nation. Such responsibilities are for those who have become adults both physically and emotionally. But what about becoming an adult *spiritually*?

Will God allow a spiritual babe to rule in His Kingdom? If He allowed such a thing, I would feel sorry for those being ruled. Anyone who has studied history knows that most of the kings and other rulers of the past had reached physical maturity, and often even had reached emotional maturity—but very few had been spiritually mature. Because of their immaturity, the people often suffered injustice and tyranny under both civil and religious leadership. God has allowed mankind to experience this kind of injustice in order to make people desire something better. By seeing the oppressiveness of man’s kingdoms, God sets forth its contrast in the concept of the Kingdom of God, ruled by the Messiah and His mature body of overcomers. Haggai 2:7 says (KJV),

**<sup>7</sup> And I will shake all nations, and the desire of all nations shall come; and I will fill this house with glory, saith the Lord of hosts.**

If there is anything that the nations desire today it is peace and justice. They have had enough bloodshed and injustice. They long for leaders that rule by love, rather than by fear. The problem is that their own civil and religious leaders promise them peace, but they are not capable of delivering it. They want peace, but only on their terms. All the tyrants in the world wanted peace—but they wanted to conquer all other nations in order to achieve that peace. Such tyrants do not know the love of God; they are selfish and self-serving. It matters not if those tyrants call themselves kings or popes. If their desire is to be served, rather than to serve, they know not the God of the Bible. All such men are disqualified from ruling in God’s Kingdom.

Another problem is that there are too many ambitious people and organizations who also want to rule. Each one has a set of followers who support their bid for power. This brings civil wars, assassinations, and continuous conflicts, and it causes the current rulers to pass restrictive laws and enforce them by military means. So the current rulers are not the only problem. The problem is caused equally by the would-be rulers, who make promises to their supporters, and if successful, they invariably become tyrants in their own way.

### Three Levels of Love

The Greek language had more than one word to describe the various kinds of love. In this, their language was much more specific than our English language. We use the term “love” to mean having a sexual relationship (i.e., “making love”), or immature love (i.e., “puppy love”), or friendship, or parental love, or self-sacrificing love.

The Greek language, however, had at least three words to describe love. *Eros* was the most immature type of love, describing a mere physical attraction that could also turn into lust. The word *eros* is not used in the New Testament at all.

*Phileo* was on a higher level, describing brotherly love, or the proper love between brother and sister. Hence, *Philadelphia* means “City of Brotherly Love.” Yet we know that as siblings grow up together, their “love” is largely based upon a fifty-fifty relationship. It is a judicial love that seeks to establish its own rights and “fair share.” Thus, *phileo* love is conditional, and those who do not break past this barrier have not been perfected in love.

It takes a mature love called *agape* to be unconditional. This is the love of God that John presents to us as our goal of spiritual maturity. *Agape* is different from *phileo* love. As siblings grow, they begin to learn the principle of property rights. This is mine, and this is yours. Do not take your brother’s toy without his permission. This side of the room is mine, and this side is yours. Children often fight for their rights, and parents find themselves in the position of a referee, having to make decisions to settle arguments. The parent is the enforcer of the law, and every time he or she settles a dispute, the child learns something about the *phileo* love. As time passes, they learn to respect the lawful rights of others and to treat others as they themselves would want to be treated.

This is good, but it is only a stage of child development. Ultimately, to be fully mature they must learn unconditional love that goes beyond one’s rights under the law. This gets into the higher concepts of mercy, grace, and forgiveness. It is not that we should despise property rights or forsake the ideas of treating others with justice for all. We are not called to *fall short* of the law, but to go *beyond* it into the principles laid down in the Gospels. Jesus said in John 13:34, 35,

**<sup>34</sup> A new commandment I give to you, that you love [*agape*] one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. <sup>35</sup> By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.**

The only sense in which this was a new commandment was because the law of Moses required *phileo* love, which is equal justice toward all. The law did not require anyone to give up their lawful rights. The law defined those rights and would always uphold any man’s right to what was lawfully his. But Jesus showed us by example how to give up everything—even how to go to the cross—in order to be a blessing to other people. That was *agape* love in action. And that is what Jesus said would distinguish His disciples from the rest of mankind.

The law of Moses requires me to love my neighbor *as* myself (Lev. 19:18). But the law does not require any man to lay down his life for another. Jesus’ new commandment requires me to love others *more* than myself, saying in John 15:13,

**<sup>13</sup> Greater love has no man than this, that one lay down his life for his friends.**

Hence, we see that the law indeed defines love, but it is limited to *phileo* love. It guides us while we are growing in spiritual maturity. It lays the foundations of justice and respect for our neighbors that is so necessary in most of life’s relationships. Learning *phileo* love is a prerequisite to learning *agape* love, for how can a person love with an unconditional love if he has not first learned conditional love in the law? This is why God gave the law first. It was so that His people could learn basic justice before moving on to the higher principles of grace that came through Jesus Christ (John 1:17).

## **Israel’s Festivals Portray Levels of Love**

The three festivals of Israel can be viewed as stages of spiritual development and also help us define each person’s level of love. When we experience the Feast of Passover by placing our faith in the blood of the Lamb of God, we become children of God on the first level. We are spiritual babes. It is a good beginning, but at this stage of development, the new Christian is often self-centered and ignorant. We do not expect much out of a baby, except to look cute. To a baby, the world revolves around him. He only knows what *he* wants and has no thought about the needs of his mother or

those around him. If hungry, he demands to be fed. If wet, he demands to be changed. If alone, he demands to be cuddled. He has no concept of putting himself in the shoes of his mother. If his mother is tired or busy doing other things, it is of no concern to him. He only knows his own need, and this is the most important thing in the world at that moment.

There are some adults who live their whole lives without ever straying far from this stage of development. Such people view other peoples' property as their own and can steal it with no twinge of conscience. If they are placed in positions of power, they can steal with more efficiency, and so much the better. They honestly believe that others exist to serve them. They feel "privileged," and despise the common people. If they happen to be religious, these spiritual babes justify their privileged status by claiming the divine right to rule.

Passover-level Christianity is characterized by *eros* love, which is self-centered. Such people are takers, not givers. In conversation, they have little or no interest in hearing, but in speaking. If they bother to ask about your welfare, you are lucky to get past a single sentence, which is then interrupted with, "That reminds me of myself."

Such Christians are not yet perfected in love, and God will not entrust to them any authority to rule in His Kingdom, for they would certainly perpetuate injustice.

Pentecostal-level Christianity is characterized by *phileo* love. As we said earlier, this is a judicial love. Pentecost is a festival that celebrates the giving of the law. This is a necessary stage of development, but it is not sufficient to rule in God's Kingdom. It is not the love of the overcomers. And yet Pentecost is where one lays all the preparatory foundations for *agape* love.

Those who hear the voice of the Spirit and learn obedience are also learning how to implement true justice, so that other people's rights are not violated. The average person, of course, is not called to a position of authority and therefore is limited in his/her ability to establish justice in other people's disputes. Most of us are limited to learning these things through family relationships—especially when we have children of our own. Settling disputes between our children is the most common way in which we learn *phileo* love and the divine law.

The Feast of Booths (or Tabernacles) portrays the goal, not only the goal of history but the goal of our individual spiritual development. It is the place of maturity where a person can discern how to rule properly. A simple example in the family would be if a child breaks a window in his neighbor's house. The parent, of course, is held liable by law. But how would the parent handle the child?

Pure *phileo* love would say to the child, "You must work to pay back the entire cost of the window." *Agape* love, however, would have additional options. The parent would discern how far to hold the child liable. Had the child done this deliberately, or was it really accidental? Had the child been told not to play with baseballs near that window? Is the child truly repentant, or making excuses? How old is the child? Should he have known better?

These are all considerations by which the parent might forgive part of the debt or even all of it. This does not put away the law—because the parent would still have to pay the debt owed to the neighbor. The parent satisfied the demand of the law, even as Christ satisfied the demand of the law for our own sins. But the question is this: Should the parent hold the child liable as well in order to teach him righteousness? If so, how much liability should the parent put upon the child?

You see, God does this with His children as well. 1 John 4:8 tells us that "God is love" (*agape*). But this does not mean that God will refuse to hold us accountable for our actions. Love and discipline are not contradictory principles. This is because God is also our Father, and He is responsible to teach us responsibility for our actions. If He were never to hold us accountable, we would not learn *phileo* love, and thus we could not learn *agape* love either. If all we saw from God was *agape* love, then we would soon believe that we could sin that grace may abound (Rom. 6:1). In other words,



we would not learn obedience; we would become lawless.

On the other hand, if God never showed us grace, we would have no example to learn the principles of *agape* love. Hence, there is a balance that must be struck. To know when to exercise *phileo* love and when to exercise *agape* love requires mature spiritual discernment. Even as God Himself knows this balance, so also are we to learn the mind of Christ, so that we are able to do the same toward our children and others in general.

The mark of an overcomer, then, is that he/she is learning *agape* love.

## Jesus' Instruction in Luke 14

There are many Bible passages that could be quoted to illustrate *agape* love. But this is not meant to be an exhaustive study on the subject. And so we have chosen a little-read instruction in Luke 14:12-14,

**<sup>12</sup> And He also went on to say to the one who had invited Him, When you give a luncheon or a dinner, do not invite your friends or your brothers or your relatives or rich neighbors, lest they also invite you in return, and repayment come to you. <sup>13</sup> But when you give a reception, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, <sup>14</sup> and you will be blessed, since they do not have the means to repay you; for you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous.**

This instruction shows in simple terms the principles of *agape* love. *Phileo* love is a fifty-fifty relationship—you help me, and I help you. It demands an equal return, for that is its lawful right. But *agape* love is manifested when a person does good with no thought of recompense from man. In fact, perfect love does not even need the incentive of a heavenly reward. But such love will indeed be rewarded.

Note also that the reward “*will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous.*” We know that men will get their rewards at the time of the resurrection. But there are two resurrections mentioned in Revelation 20. The first resurrection, as we saw in Lesson 1, includes only the righteous, while the general resurrection a thousand years later includes both the righteous and the unrighteous (John 5:28, 29). And so we see in Jesus' teaching in Luke 14 that those who manifest the unconditional love of God will be rewarded “*at the resurrection of the righteous*”—that is, the first resurrection.

## Lesson 4 ... On Being in Agreement

Being a forgiver is a basic requirement to be an overcomer. But forgiving others can be done out of compulsion, if a Christian does it merely because he knows that God requires it. In other words, it might be possible to forgive without actually agreeing with God in the matter.

Likewise, a person might be obedient, submitting to the will of God, and yet not agree with His will. And two people who disagree can only walk together if there is unconditional love between them. Unconditional love does not mean that they are in agreement. Hence, all of the earlier requirements that we have listed are really things that we must learn while we walk the earth as God's servants. Agreement is not so much a lesson to be learned as a state of being in which we walk by nature.

Genesis 2:24 says,

**<sup>24</sup> For this cause a man shall leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave to his wife; and they shall become one flesh.**

For some, the idea of becoming “one flesh” is purely a physical, sexual encounter. For those with more understanding, they see that it also indicates being of one mind and soul. But there is

something even deeper to this. It is becoming one spirit. Yet on all three levels, the foundational concept set forth is unity, or agreement.

For this reason Jesus Christ left His Father (Yahweh) and Mother (El Shaddai) and came to earth to “*cleave to His wife.*” (This is not to say that Yahweh, El Shaddai, and Jesus are different individual Gods, as some may think. This is not the place for such discussion, but in a manner of speaking, to fulfill Gen. 2:24, Jesus had to come to earth where His bride lived in order to become “one flesh” with her.)

## Two Kinds of Marriage Relationship

An overcomer is one who is in agreement with God. Agreement is the most important ingredient of a New Covenant marriage depicted by Sarah, the freewoman.

In Galatians 4:22-31 the apostle Paul speaks of the two covenants as being depicted by Hagar and Sarah—that is, the bondwoman and the freewoman. In biblical times there were two distinct kinds of marriage. If a man married a bondwoman, they had more of a master-servant relationship. Such a wife had fewer rights and certainly had no voice in making any family decisions. Her husband may have granted her that privilege, but he was under no obligation to do so.

This is a Hagar-type marriage covenant. It describes also the relationship that Israel had with God when they were married at Mount Sinai. It was an Old Covenant marriage, and in Exodus 19:5 Israel had to swear to be obedient to God as her Husband. Israel became God’s servant-wife. This is not bad, but neither is it fully the kind of marriage relationship that God wants with His people. He is looking for more, and that is why He built into His plan the fact that He would eventually divorce Israel (Jer. 3:8) and make a New Covenant that was based upon better things.

The New Covenant is portrayed by Sarah, the freewoman. A marriage based upon the New Covenant is not built around the idea of *obedience*, but the idea of *agreement*. For this reason, Hosea 2:16 speaks of God’s New Covenant marriage with Israel, saying, “*you will call me Ishi [My Husband], and will no longer call me Baali [My Lord or Master].*” When a married couple is in agreement, what need is there to speak of obedience in a master-servant relationship? It would be irrelevant, because there is no further need to command one’s spouse to do something. Authority is exercised only when there is a lack of agreement, and the one in authority must order the other to do his will.

For this reason, God has no intention of marrying non-overcomers. An overcomer is one who is in agreement with God (Jesus Christ). An overcomer knows His mind or seeks until he knows it. And when he discovers the will of God, he finds himself in agreement—or continues to seek understanding until he finally comes into perfect agreement with Him. In the course of learning and spiritual development, of course, the overcomer may not understand the mind of God immediately, but meanwhile, he will obey as a good servant. But he is not satisfied simply to do the will of God. He is driven to seek to understand the mind of God until he comes to full agreement.

To disagree with God is to lack understanding. If we could see the universe as God sees it, we would all understand why God does what He does, and there would be no disagreement. The problem is that we do not view the world with the divine perspective. This does not automatically change as soon as a person accepts Jesus Christ and is justified by faith in a Passover experience. Neither does a person come into full agreement with Him when he is filled with the Spirit through the Feast of Pentecost. It requires a person to develop spiritually into a Tabernacles relationship, “*that you may be filled up to all the fullness of God*” (Eph. 3:19).

Thus, when we apply the Old and New Covenant marriage principle to Christian individuals, it becomes apparent that when we first come to Christ, we are not suddenly spiritually mature. Our

relationship with Christ begins as a master-servant relationship, even as that seen with the House of Israel in the Old Testament. We must learn obedience first, because that is the first step in our growth.

The function of *the divine law* is to give us basic principles and guidelines that are written down and applicable to all men. We are then admonished to be *led by the Spirit*, so that we may come to understand the mind of God and learn to apply those written principles properly. Israel under Moses was given a written law, but this was no substitute for following the pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night—both of which represented the Holy Spirit's leading. Neither did the Holy Spirit's leading contradict what God had written in the law. Both came from the same Source and have always been in agreement.

Thus, the purpose of a believer's spiritual growth is to begin with obedience and end with agreement. I would also go so far as to say that no man apart from Jesus Himself has ever been able to bypass the obedience stage, because no man starts out always in full agreement with God. This was as true before the cross as it is afterward. And thus, while we claim to be under the New Covenant even today, it is more accurate to say that this is our goal, rather than what we have attained.

This is also why John spoke of the "marriage supper of the Lamb" as if it were yet future (Rev. 19:9). God has no intention of marrying any body of people in a New Covenant marriage until they are in agreement with Him. He married a Hagar at Sinai, but He will only marry a Sarah the second time. This is why only the overcomers will inherit the first resurrection to rule with Him (Rev. 20:4-6). A Sarah wife has tremendous authority in a New Covenant marriage, because she does only what her Husband does. She exercises her authority as if it were Him doing it—and it IS Him doing it, because they have become "one flesh" (Gen. 2:24).

## Thus Says the Amen

Rev. 3:14 says:

**<sup>14</sup> And to the angel of the church in Laodicea write: The Amen, the faithful and true Witness, the Beginning of the creation of God, says this:**

Here Jesus, speaking to the Church of Laodicea, calls Himself "the Amen." This title is taken from Isaiah 65:16, which says,

**<sup>16</sup> Because he who is blessed in the earth shall be blessed by the God of truth [Heb: *amen*], and he who swears in the earth shall swear by the God of truth [Heb: *amen*] . . .**

The Hebrew word for *truth* is *amet*, or *emet*. But amen means *truly*. The words are related, but not precisely the same. Isaiah could have used the word *amet* if he had intended to refer to the God of *truth*. But he did not. He used the word *amen*. In using this word, he turned it into a title of God (that is, Christ), as shown in Rev. 3:14.

The word *amen* was used in Num. 5:22, Deut. 27:15-36, and many other places to denote confirmation and agreement. Those who said "Amen" indicated that they believed something to be true and that they were agreeing to submit to that word. And so in Rev. 3:14 we find Jesus Himself being "The Amen" of God, indicating total agreement with His Father. In John 5:19 we read,

**<sup>19</sup> Jesus therefore answered and was saying to them, Truly, truly [i.e., Amen! Amen!] I say to you, the Son can do nothing of Himself, unless it is something He sees the Father doing; for whatever the Father does, these things the Son also does in like manner.**

Again in John 5:30 Jesus says,

**<sup>30</sup> I can do nothing on my own initiative. As I hear, I judge; and My judgment is just, because I do not seek My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me. <sup>31</sup> If I alone bear witness of Myself, My testimony is not true.**

This is what made Jesus the Amen of the Father. The Father provided the heavenly witness, and the Son provided the earthly witness. These two witnesses established all things according to the law of the double witness. This was how the heavens and the earth were created in the beginning, for we read in John 1:3,

**<sup>3</sup> All things came into being by [*dia*: “through”] Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being.**

The Father is Spirit; the Son is Spirit made Flesh—spiritual flesh. The two together, working in harmony and agreement, establish all things. Heaven and earth were the two witnesses that were needed to create the universe. This is why the prophet, after telling us about the God of Amen, says in the next verses (Isaiah 65:17-19),

**<sup>17</sup> For behold, I create new heavens and a new earth; and the former things shall not be remembered or come to mind. <sup>18</sup> But be glad and rejoice forever in what I create; for behold, I create [new] Jerusalem for rejoicing, and her people for gladness. <sup>19</sup> I will also rejoice in [new] Jerusalem, and be glad in My people; and there will no longer be heard in her the voice of weeping and the sound of crying.**

The fact that Isaiah was speaking of the New Jerusalem and not the old is evident when we read Rev. 21:1-5. In the New Jerusalem God will wipe away all tears, even as Isaiah described. And verse 5 ends with,

**<sup>5</sup> And He who sits on the throne said, Behold, I am making all things new. And He said, Write, for these words are faithful and true.**

What is He making “new” if not the heavens, the earth, and Jerusalem? And so, getting back to Rev. 3:14, we read about—

**<sup>14</sup> . . . the Amen, the Beginning of the creation of God.**

It is precisely by the Amen principle that all things were created at the beginning. It is by this same Amen principle that the new creation is accomplished when He makes all things new. The only difference is that this time He is bringing forth an Amen People, a body of overcomers who will, in one sense, form His Body, and in another sense be His Bride—for they will be “one flesh.”

Becoming “one flesh” (Gen. 2:24) is first and foremost a matter of unity—coming into agreement in spirit, soul, and body. The overcomers are one in spirit with their Father.

The overcomers have become living sacrifices and are transformed by the renewing of their mind (soul). Upon this body the Head can rest in unity. And now God is looking for an Amen People, the Body of Christ, the Body of the Amen. He is raising up just such a body, called overcomers, in order that He might create a New Heavens, a New Earth, and a New Jerusalem through their earthly witness.

## **Epilogue**

Being an overcomer is not really difficult. The principles are simple, and these are in some way taught not only in churches but everywhere. Who has not heard that forgiveness is a virtue? What Christian has not prayed the Lord’s Prayer, which says, “and forgive us our trespasses and we forgive our debtors”? What Christian has not heard that God expects us to be obedient? What

Christian has not heard that we are to show forth the unconditional love of Christ?

The problem is that it seems ingrained into us the old Catholic concept of “sainthood.” They say that there are a few “saints,” but that path is too difficult for the average person. Such a mindset has discouraged many a Catholic. How often I have heard one say, *“Well, I know I can’t be a saint, so I may as well enjoy life while I’m here. As long as I remain a Church member, I know that I will at least make it to heaven some day, even if I have to spend a lot of time in purgatory.”* Recognition as a “saint” in the Catholic Church requires the person to perform at least two verifiable miracles. That would disqualify John the Baptist, who did no miracles (John 10:41). The greatest prophet did no miracles! Matthew 11:11 says,

**<sup>11</sup> Truly, I say to you, among those born of women there has not arisen anyone greater than John the Baptist; yet he who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.**

While men have plotted to be great in the kingdom of heaven, even to attaining top positions in the religion, Jesus said that this was not the way to be great in the Kingdom. In fact, if anything, the religious leaders were to be at the bottom of the chain of authority in God’s Kingdom. In Matthew 20, Jesus made this very clear:

**<sup>25</sup> But Jesus called them to Himself and said, You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great men exercise authority over them. <sup>26</sup> It is not so among you, but whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant, <sup>27</sup> and whoever wishes to be first among you shall be your slave; <sup>28</sup> just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.**

Mark 9:35 bears witness to this, saying,

**<sup>35</sup> And sitting down, He called the twelve and said to them, If anyone wants to be first, he shall be last of all, and servant of all.**

So the concept of sainthood is different from the biblical teaching of being an overcomer. The one requires being great in the eyes of men; the other requires being a little person. Neither is great knowledge a requirement to be an overcomer. Literacy is not a requirement to be an overcomer, nor does one have to go to seminary. Being an overcomer has more to do with the two great commandments: loving God with all your heart and your neighbor as yourself.

Being an overcomer has everything to do with our relationship with Jesus Christ and being faithful to Him to do as He leads. Jesus told a parable in Matthew 25, which shows who will be given authority to rule in God’s Kingdom. Matthew 25:21 says,

**<sup>21</sup> His master said to him, Well done, good and faithful slave; you were faithful with a few things, I will put you in charge of many things, enter into the joy of your master.**

This master was not addressing a great general or a pope. He was addressing one of his slaves. The master was not looking for great conquests; he was just looking for faithfulness in the little things of life. That is an overcomer.

Amen.