

To Him Who Overcomes

by Hendrik Joubert

In a recent discussion it was decided that God is genderless, therefore we should not, and could not use any (masculine) personal pronoun when we speak or write of *Him*. Some have argued that God may be female. This kind of petty talk forms part of *man's* general attempt to take charge and change what we know about God to suit them. It reminds one of how an idol is formed and defined to serve the needs of the individual. The God who reveals Himself through His creation (**Romans 1:19-21**), but also through His word (**2Timothy 3:16-17**), demands that sinners enter a course of action not unlike what we refer to as rehabilitation – a process whereby we have to *overcome* ourselves. For the record, Jesus, the Christ, the Son of the living God teaches us to address God as ***our Father who is in heaven, Hallowed be Your name.*** (**Matthew 6:9**)

Uttering these words as we pray to God does not prove that we revere Him. Reverence for God, and His holy name, is demonstrated by our conduct: ***If you address as Father the One who impartially judges according to each one's work, conduct yourselves in fear during the time of your stay on earth;...*** (**1 Peter 1:17**)

In order for rehabilitation to be successful the first and foremost principle is that one recognizes and acknowledges there is a problem. As long as one is in denial the process cannot start. In His sermon on the mount the Lord states the need for humility. (**Matthew 5:3**) Our society has taught us to feel good about ourselves even when we are deviant. The word *allegedly* is demanded even when a person is caught *red-handed*. Our legal system does not seem to serve to protect the innocent, but rather to provide the guilty with a way to escape responsibility for their actions. Someone, or something else is to be blamed – *the devil made me do it*.

Some individuals approached the Lord for His comments after judging from what happened to others that they themselves must be good people (or at least not as bad). The Lord replied: ***"Do you suppose that these Galileans were greater sinners than all other Galileans because they suffered this fate?"***³ ***"I tell you, no, but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish.*** (**Luke 13:2-3**) Through the apostle Paul God states the condition of every person: ***...for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,...*** (**Romans 3:23-24**) We are not safe until we really mess up; we are lost unless we approach God for forgiveness.

When Paul declares the wonderful solution in the next verse ***...being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus...*** most realize that not all will benefit from the grace of God. Paul explains why some will fail to receive this benefit: ***For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men,¹² instructing us to deny ungodliness and worldly desires and to live sensibly, righteously and godly in the present age,...*** (**Titus 2:11-12**)

To most grace means nothing more than a *free gift* in spite of living their lives the way they want to. They will make *humble confessions* that they are *only human* and that *no one is perfect*. The idea that the grace of God would **instruct** men how to conduct their lives raises the objection that one would then have to *work* to deserve salvation. The objection seems noble and humble at first, until one realizes that it in fact denies submission to the instructions revealed in this **grace of God: ... instructing us to deny ungodliness and worldly desires and to live sensibly, righteously and godly in the present age,...** How blasphemous to think that one could *deserve* salvation by simple obedience to His will.

In **Revelation 2:7** the Lord makes this profound statement: **"He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes, I will grant to eat of the tree of life which is in the Paradise of God."** The Lord repeats it after each address to each of the churches. Some received compliments as well as reproof, making it obvious that submitting to the grace of God is not optional. The process starts with a humble admission of sin. In **Acts 2:38** we find the straightforward and gracious instruction to those who are **pricked to the heart** when they learn of their sinful condition after believing that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God who came to die for our sins: **"Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit."**

It is through Paul's letter to the Romans that we learn the actual details of the new birth, declared essential for salvation by the Lord (**John 3:3-5**). When a person is baptized, he is buried in water simulating the death, burial and resurrection of the Lord: **Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life.** (Romans 6:4)

The sinner is buried and the follower of Christ is raised to walk in a **new life**, after being **born of the water and the spirit** in this simple manner where the person who baptizes does the work. This is the beginning of a new life and, through the grace of God, one is instructed **to deny ungodliness and worldly desires and to live sensibly and godly in the present age**. This is a lifetime challenge as we work at submitting our will to that of God to **overcome** ourselves through the exercise of self-control. (**Acts 24:25**) Consider the order of the points in Paul's sermon to Felix **...as he was discussing righteousness, self-control and the judgment to come, Felix became frightened and said, "Go away for the present, and when I find time I will summon you."**

Those who wish to please God has to exercise **self-control** in order to overcome their sinful desires as we submit to the **righteousness** of God revealed through His grace because, as in the case with the seven churches mentioned in the book of Revelation, each of us will face God in judgment. **"He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes, I will grant to eat of the tree of life which is in the Paradise of God"** (Revelation 2:7)