

# THE ORGANIC REWARDS TO THE OVERCOMERS IN THE SEVEN CHURCHES IN REVELATION

BY JOHN PESTER

Promises of blessings are present throughout the Bible, and Christians should confidently regard and hope for their bestowal both in this age and in the ages to come. These blessings, however, have routinely been characterized on the pages of Christian commentaries and construed in the minds of most Christians as being material in nature when in fact, they are spiritual in nature. We have been blessed with spiritual blessings (Eph. 1:3), that is, blessings that are by the Spirit, through the Spirit, and of the Spirit. The material “blessings” that most Christians seek and regard are more accurately depicted in the New Testament as being merely “things” that are added to those who seek first the kingdom and our Lord’s righteousness (Matt. 6:31-33).

For the most part, the New Testament references to blessings are associated with God’s people blessing God or blessing others (Luke 1:64; 24:53; Eph. 1:3; James 3:10; 1 Pet. 3:9; Rev. 5:12-13; 7:12) rather than receiving material blessings themselves. When the content of a blessing is mentioned, it is most often spiritual, such as not having sin accounted to us (Rom. 4:7-8), coming in the fullness of the blessing of Christ (15:29), receiving the cup of blessing in the fellowship of the blood of Christ (1 Cor. 10:16), and receiving the blessing of the promised Spirit (Gal. 3:14). The one instance that speaks of material blessings is in the context of the material giving by one local church to another local church in need, not to God giving material blessings to an individual (2 Cor. 9:5-6).

The association of material things with the rewards that are promised to the overcomers in the seven local churches in Revelation 2 and 3 is also a common understanding in the minds of most Christians. In contrast to the general New Testament references to blessing, chapters 2 and 3 contain detailed descriptions of these rewards, which serve the purpose of providing specific incentives to encourage the believers to endeavor to overcome the degraded situations in the local churches to whom the Spirit is speaking. Without clearly defining these rewards, few believers would be incentivized to pursue toward the goal of God’s high calling. Without contextualizing the granting of these rewards to the coming millennial kingdom, few believers would receive the admonitions inherent in the depictions of these rewards. And without seeing the spiritual and organic nature of these rewards, few believers would appreciate the depths of the divine and mystical nature of these rewards. These rewards are specific to the challenges that believers should endeavor to overcome in order to manifest the testimony of Jesus. These rewards are reserved for the overcomers who have, through their life and service, been qualified to participate in the millennial kingdom. And these rewards are intrinsically organic, coming from the Lord who identifies Himself to John as the living One (1:18) and who imparts Himself as life through the Spirit’s speaking to the churches.

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## The Living One

When the apostle John first saw the Lord, he encountered One who, in appearance, was completely unlike the person of John's memory. Every aspect of His person was awesome and intimidating: His head and hair were as white as white wool, His eyes were like a flame of fire, His feet were like shining bronze, His voice was like the sound of many waters, His face shone as the sun, and a sharp two-edged sword proceeded out of His mouth (vv. 14-16). John's response was to fall as dead before the Lord, but the Lord comforted and reassured him, saying, "Do not fear; I am the First and the Last and the living One; and I became dead, and behold, I am living forever and ever; and I have the keys of death and of Hades" (vv. 17-18). In all His descriptions of Himself in Revelation 2 and 3, the Lord alludes to or directly speaks of the paramount importance of His organic divine life from which all His person, work, and rewards derive. He is the First and the Last because He is the living One who is living forever and whom death cannot suppress, because He holds the keys of death and of Hades.

Prior to speaking of His status as the living One, the Lord charges John: "What you see write in a scroll and send it to the seven churches: to Ephesus and to Smyrna and to Pergamos and to Thyatira and to Sardis and to Philadelphia and to Laodicea" (v. 11). With His focus at the beginning of Revelation on the churches and on His divine life, the Lord connects the churches with the essential aspect of His being—the organic divine life that is not only inherent within His person but has been made available to redeemed and regenerated humanity. The life that issues forth from Christ as the Spirit is needed by the church through all the stages of its historical development, as represented by the seven churches in Asia, to produce overcomers who withstand the church's downward trend toward degradation.

These overcomers are produced by the impartation and experience of the divine life of the living One, and the manifestation of this divine life is seen in the rewards that the Lord gives to the overcomers in the coming millennial kingdom. All these rewards, despite the tendency to interpret them as material manifestations, should be properly interpreted as being organic in nature, because the source of the rewards determines the content and expression of the rewards. Just as the fruit of the Spirit, who is the realization of Christ, is the overflow of the organic life of Christ in His manifestation as love, joy, peace, long-suffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, meekness, and self-control (Gal. 5:22-23; see also Witness Lee's footnote on verse 22 in the *Recovery Version*), so also the rewards in the millennial kingdom are related to the overflow of the organic grace and reality of Christ experienced in the present age.

## The Overcomers Receiving Organic Rewards in the Millennial Kingdom

The millennial rewards spoken of in Revelation 2 and 3 are organic rewards given to those who overcome in this present age. Even though the Lord's call for overcomers in each of the churches is directed toward all believers, not every believer responds to His call. Thus, the rewards, which are bestowed during the millennial kingdom, as E. W. Bullinger notes in *Commentary on Revelation*, are all "intensely individual. There is no corporate existence recognised as such. Each one of the seven promises commences with the same words, 'To him that overcometh'" (88). By "corporate existence," Bullinger means that there is no category of overcomers that encompasses all the believers. An overcomer is an individual Christian who has lived a victorious life in the church age by maturing in the divine life and manifesting its expression according to its requirements during the particular stage of the church's development. The crown of overcoming that was laid up for Paul was not laid up for all Christians (2 Tim. 4:8). G. H. Lang emphatically stresses the individual status of an overcomer in *The Revelation of Jesus Christ*, saying,

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The assertion that all believers are overcomers is so plainly contrary to fact and to Scripture that one wonders it ever has been made. It involves the false position that no believer can be a backslider. It avoids and nullifies the solemn warnings and urgent pleadings of the Spirit addressed to believers, and, by depriving the Christian of these, leaves him dangerously exposed to the perils they reveal. (91)

When commentators associate the overcomers with a group that is comprised of all Christians, they implicitly, automatically, and unconditionally ascribe the rewards to all Christians, removing the thought that there is a need for any diligent pursuit of Christ. With such a thought, there can be little to no growth in the divine life, and without an incentive to be brought on to maturity, a believer who is deceived by this notion will suffer discipline during the millennial kingdom; that is, he or she will be dangerously exposed to the perils that are in contradistinction to the organic rewards that are promised to the more prudent overcomers.

**A**n overcomer prudently seeks to grow in the divine life, because the organic growth of this life in the children of God is the criteria for overcoming (1 John 2:13-14; 4:4; 5:4) and thus qualifies one to participate in the coming millennial kingdom. Growth produces maturity, and the divine call in this age is to be brought on to maturity (Heb. 6:1). There is a witness in our regenerated human spirit to the need for maturity because our spirit is a spirit of sonship, which is the mature expression of the children of God (Rom. 8:15-16). Our spirit subjectively longs for and seeks maturity, and the Scriptures objectively testify of the expression of maturity in every book in the New Testament. In the Gospel of Matthew those who are mature are responsive to the demands of the kingdom (chs. 5—7). In the Gospel of Mark those who are mature seek to serve rather than to be served (10:45). In the Gospel of Luke those who are mature allow the divine seed within them to bring forth fruit to maturity (8:14). In the Gospel of John those who are mature abide in the vine and bear much fruit (15:4-5). In Acts those who are mature heed the forbidding Spirit (16:6). In Romans those who are mature enjoy the much-more salvation that issues forth from the life of Christ operating within them (5:10). In 1 Corinthians those who are mature are not fleshly related to their body or childish related to spiritual things but are full-grown in their understanding of matters related to the soul (3:3; 13:11; 14:20). In 2 Corinthians those who are mature are being transformed into the image of the Lord from glory to glory by beholding and reflecting the Lord in the Word (3:18). In Galatians those who are mature have Christ living and being formed in them in addition to initially being revealed in them (2:20; 4:19; 1:16). In Ephesians those who are mature are growing unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, having heard and been taught in Him as the reality is in Jesus (4:13, 21). In Philippians those who are mature count all things as loss on account of the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus in order to gain Him (3:8). In Colossians those who are mature hold the Head as members of the Body and grow with the growth of God (2:19). In 1 Thessalonians those who are mature possess their vessels—spirit and soul and body—in sanctification and honor (4:4; 5:23). In 2 Thessalonians those who are mature are not quickly shaken in mind nor alarmed when confronted with things contrary to the truth but, rather, stand firm and hold to the things which were handed down to them and which they were taught (2:2, 12, 15). In 1 Timothy those who are mature manifest the mystery of godliness in the church as the pillar and base of the truth, and they supply the members of the Body as good ministers of the Christ whom they have experienced (3:15-16; 4:6). In 2 Timothy those who are mature flee youthful lusts and pursue righteousness, faith, love, and peace with those who call on the name of the Lord out of a pure heart (2:22). In Titus those who are mature have the capacity in life to set in order the things in the church according to godliness (1:1-2, 5). In Philemon those who are mature are able to receive and recommend the fellow members of the Body, irrespective of race or social status (vv. 10, 17). In Hebrews those who are mature are instructed in the word of righteousness and come forward with boldness to the throne of grace to find grace

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in order to run the race with endurance (5:13; 4:16; 12:1). In James those who are mature live a practical life by means of the implanted word, which produces Christian perfection through the saving of the soul (1:21). In 1 Peter those who are mature long for the guileless milk of the word, by which they may grow and which enables them to submit to God's governmental arrangement by humbling themselves under the mighty hand of God (2:2, 21-23; 5:6). In 2 Peter those who are mature partake of the divine nature through the precious and exceedingly great promises that supply a rich entrance into the millennial kingdom of our Lord and Savior (1:4, 11). In the Epistles of John those who are mature participate in the fellowship of the divine life and abide in and exhibit the divine love, guard themselves from idols, stand against the spirit of antichrist, and walk in truth (1 John 1:3, 7; 4:12, 16; 5:21; 2 John 7; 3 John 3-4). In Jude those who are mature earnestly contend for the faith and do not defile the flesh, despise lordship, or revile dignities (vv. 3, 8). And in Revelation those who are mature display the characteristics of the overcomers spoken of in chapters 2 and 3.

**T**he entire New Testament, beginning with the Gospel of Matthew and ending with the Revelation of Jesus Christ, presents more than just an initial salvation related to the forgiveness of sins and reconciliation to God; it stresses the experience of God's organic salvation, following redemption and reconciliation (Rom. 5:10). This experience produces a manifestation of maturity<sup>1</sup> through the experience and enjoyment of the eternal life of Christ, which has been made available to those who have been redeemed and regenerated. This is the abundant life that the Lord spoke of in John 10:10. This life has been mercifully and graciously given to us, but it is our righteous responsibility, as those who have received this grace, to stand in this grace (Rom. 5:2), to receive the abundance of grace (v. 17), to function according to the measure of the grace given to us (12:6), to wisely build according to the grace given to us (1 Cor. 3:10), to not let the grace given to us turn out to be in vain (15:10), to conduct ourselves in the world according to grace (2 Cor. 1:12), to accept His sufficient grace in our circumstances (12:9), to not nullify the grace of God or fall from grace (Gal. 2:21; 5:4), to participate in a stewardship of grace (Eph. 3:2), to be a fellow partaker with others of this grace (Phil. 1:7), to be empowered in this grace (2 Tim. 2:1), to come forward to the throne of grace (Heb. 4:16), to not insult the Spirit of grace or fall away from grace (10:29; 12:15), to be a good steward of the varied grace of God (1 Pet. 4:10), and, as most broadly indicated, to grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ (2 Pet. 3:18).

In the New Testament the blessings of God are a matter of God's rich mercy and freely given grace (Eph. 2:4-5, 8). We have been graced in the Beloved by being chosen and predestinated unto sonship, and because of the Father's merciful selection, we have been graciously blessed with every spiritual blessing in the heavenlies in Christ (1:3-6). God's blessings are based on His nature of love (1 John 4:16), but God's rewards are based on His nature of righteousness (Rom. 3:26). God is righteous in His dealings with His people, and His bestowal of rewards is based on righteousness, not grace. We should not be led astray to think that the unrighteous, that is, those who have received the grace of God but have not grown in righteousness and holiness of the reality (Eph. 4:24), will inherit the kingdom of God as a reward (1 Cor. 6:9). Grace reigns through righteousness (Rom. 5:21), and one who is unrighteous will not be crowned organically with righteousness in the day of the Lord's appearing (2 Tim. 4:8).

The Lord's appearing will result in the defeat of the angelic and human armies of Satan and Antichrist on the negative side, but on the positive side, it will usher in the millennial kingdom with the inaugural event being the marriage dinner of the Lamb with God's organically constituted overcomers as His bride (Rev. 19:7, 9). At the marriage dinner the bride will be "clothed in fine linen, bright and clean; for the fine linen is the righteousnesses of the saints" (v. 8). The bride's being clothed with fine linen is a sign

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that God's organic righteousness has been constituted into the overcomers through their positive response in receiving God's organic grace and in being sanctified according to God's standard of righteousness. In contrast to the overcomers as the bride, there is one who is without such a "garment" in Matthew 22:11-13:

When the king came in to look at those reclining at table, he saw there a man who was not clothed with a wedding garment, and he said to him, Friend, how did you come in here without a wedding garment? And he was speechless. Then the king said to the servants, Bind his feet and hands, and cast him out into the outer darkness. In that place there will be the weeping and the gnashing of teeth.

The place of weeping and gnashing of teeth is a place apart from the millennial kingdom's enjoyment of the organic rewards bestowed on the overcomers, who have made themselves ready (Rev. 19:7) by participating in and being constituted with the much-more salvation in the divine life that is available to all believers in this age. Those who have organically reigned in life in this age will be rewarded organically at that time in the millennial kingdom. These rewards will not be material in nature but will be a further manifestation of the overcomers' organic constitution in the divine life in this age. These rewards will be a special enjoyment of the overcomers' full union and identification with Christ as a foretaste of the believers' full participation in God's eternal economy in Christ as the New Jerusalem. In contrast to the overcomers' portion in the millennial kingdom, the immature believers' portion will be the weeping and gnashing of their teeth over their lost enjoyment of the divine life. Various aspects of the overcomers' enhanced organic union and identification with Christ in the millennial kingdom are specifically presented as rewards in the epistles to the seven churches in Asia in Revelation 2 and 3.<sup>2</sup>


### Material and Organic Interpretations of the Rewards in Revelation 2 and 3

The vast majority of the comments concerning the rewards to the overcomers in the seven churches focus on material interpretations of these rewards, largely because the expositors have little to no understanding or appreciation of the spiritual nature of God's blessings and rewards. They fail to see the essential role of the operation of the divine life, which can, if accessed, operate in us in power to present us full-grown in Christ (Eph. 1:19; Col. 1:28-29).<sup>3</sup> It is inconceivable that one who is full-grown in Christ, having been conformed to the image of Christ (Rom. 8:29) and having arrived at the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ (Eph. 4:13), would have any regard for a material reward, having turned away from physical and material inducements through his denial of the self in this age. It is equally inconceivable that Christ, who is joined as one to the overcoming believer (1 Cor. 6:17), would allow material things to supplant Himself as that one's exceedingly great reward. The tendency to focus on material interpretations is emblematic of a trivialization of the truth inherent in most commentaries that disregards God's eternal intention to impart Himself as life into His chosen, redeemed, and regenerated sons. That God would consummate His spiritual operation in His divine economy with material rewards is inherently contradictory and patently shortsighted. Nevertheless, the rewards to the overcomers in the seven churches are routinely interpreted as being literal and material rewards.

### The Reward to the Overcomers in Ephesus

The need for overcomers in the church in Ephesus is highlighted in the Lord's words: "I have one thing against you, that you have left your first love. Remember therefore where you have fallen from and repent and do the first works; but if not, I am coming to you and will remove your lampstand out of its place, unless you repent" (Rev. 2:4-5). The overcomers who repent and return to the first works that issue from loving the Lord are rewarded with eating the tree of life in the Paradise of God (v. 7).

THOSE WHO HAVE ORGANICALLY REIGNED IN LIFE IN THIS AGE WILL BE REWARDED ORGANICALLY IN THE MILLENNIAL KINGDOM. THESE REWARDS WILL BE A FURTHER MANIFESTATION OF THE OVERCOMERS' ORGANIC CONSTITUTION IN THE DIVINE LIFE IN THIS AGE.



Most commentaries interpret the tree of life as a literal tree and associate the Paradise of God with a restored garden of Eden. Both of these interpretations are material in nature. In *Studies in Revelation: Christ's Victory over the Forces of Darkness*, J. Hampton Keathley III writes, "The tree of life is literal. It is not just a symbol for eternal life or for the person of Christ" (55). Robert Govett in *Govett on Revelation* echoes this sentiment, saying, "'Tis a literal tree; as literal as the city of God, as literal as the garden of Eden" (87). In contrast to a purely literal interpretation of the tree of life, some commentators at least acknowledge the symbolic nature of the tree as a sign, in accordance with the principle stated by John in Revelation 1:1 that the revelation of Jesus Christ was made known through signs—symbols that should be interpreted spiritually rather than materially. In *The Overcomers: The Unveiling of Hope, Comfort, and Encouragement in the Book of Revelation*, Chuck Colclasure says, "Jesus promises that those who overcome through Christ have their relationship with the Father restored, and thus they are invited to eat of the tree—a symbol of the gift of eternal life which is bestowed upon all who follow Jesus" (39). Colclasure's word concerning the gift of eternal life is welcome, but his identification of those who receive this gift as being those whose relationship with the Father has been restored is misplaced. A believer's relationship with the Father is not restored as a reward in the millennial kingdom; it is restored when by faith he is reconciled to God by the death of His Son in this age. Furthermore, in God's reconciliation in this age, a believer also receives the gift of God's eternal life. If we have not been given to eat of a literal tree of life in this age but have, instead, received Christ as the Spirit to be our bountiful spiritual supply as the reality of the tree of life (Phil. 1:19), why would we expect God to lower the standard of His supply in the coming age to material things? We have been given the opportunity to eat Christ in this age (John 6:57), although in our experience we often do so only sporadically; in the coming age, however, the overcomers will enter into a continuous and uninterrupted enjoyment of partaking of Christ as the tree of life.

The reward of eating occurs in the Paradise of God, and many commentaries understand this Paradise, at least in principle, to be a restored garden of Eden. In *Revelation*, Louis A. Brighton writes, "The 'tree of life' and 'paradise' (Rev. 2:7) give promise of eternal life in the new heaven and earth, the restored Garden of Eden" (69), and in *Revelation: Verse by Verse*, Grant R. Osborne says, "In Revelation 22:2 the curse of the first Eden is lifted and eternal life is extended to the saints...In the new heavens and new earth of 21:1–22:5, the original Edenic paradise will be restored and reinstated on behalf of the victors—the people of God" (53). In his explication Osborne fails to see the distinction between the manifestation of the millennial kingdom as the Paradise of God and the new heavens and new earth with the New Jerusalem as the eternal mutual dwelling of the Triune God and His redeemed, regenerated, and glorified sons. A "restored" garden of Eden is a reward that is of a lower standard than the one intended by God in His eternal plan.

The standard of God's reward to the overcomers in Ephesus is an organic standard, which is highlighted by the most important word in the promised reward—*eat*. Almost unwittingly this word is overlooked; it is easier to focus on *tree of life* and *Paradise*. The reward is to eat, that is, to be organically supplied with the organic life of Christ, who is the reality of the sign of the tree of life. In chapter 22 the tree of life, symbolically, grows on both sides of the river of water of life, which flows from the throne of God and of the Lamb (vv. 1-2), indicating that the river and the tree are associated with Christ as the flowing Spirit. To eat of the tree is to eat of Christ, and to eat of and be supplied by Christ continuously is a great reward. Our experience of being supplied by the divine life in this age is intermittent at best because our first love is not always Christ and must, therefore, be continually recalibrated toward Him and turned from other things unto Him. However, as we turn in this age, we wash our robes, and this opens the way for God to righteously restore our right to the tree of life (v. 14). In the millennial kingdom the overcomers will enjoy continuous access to

the tree; that is, their being joined to the Lord will be fully realized in their experience, and they will also enjoy a continuous and fresh supply of Christ, as indicated by the tree producing new fruit each month (v. 2). The overcomers will enjoy this continuous access and supply initially as an organic reward in the millennial kingdom, the Paradise of God, and eternally in the mutual dwelling of God in humanity and humanity in God—the New Jerusalem.

### The Reward to the Overcomers in Smyrna

When the Lord addressed the church in Smyrna, He identified Himself as “the First and the Last, who became dead and lived again” (2:8), signaling the importance of the divine life, specifically as the resurrection life of God, in situations of suffering and tribulation (vv. 9-10). The church in Smyrna, by bearing a testimony of this life, did not receive a rebuke from the Lord; instead, she received a promise of a crown of life for being faithful unto death (v. 10). The faithful overcomers are also promised a reward of not being hurt by the second death in the millennial kingdom (v. 11).

In *Revelation: An Expositional Commentary*, Donald Grey Barnhouse speaks of the crown of life in ambiguously material terms, saying, “Mark well that this is not a promise of life but the crown of life. Life is not a reward for faithfulness. Life is a gift of grace. The crown of life belongs not to all, but only to that select few whom He chooses to suffer with Him, even unto physical death” (49). By speaking of those who receive the crown of life as ones who have been chosen to “suffer with Him,” Barnhouse, perhaps unwittingly, makes the crown a gift granted to a few rather than a reward. The reward of being crowned with life is given to those who, when confronted with persecution to the point of death, willingly accept it, knowing that the ever-living One is standing both with them and in them. In *Life-study of Revelation*, Witness Lee points to the spiritual nature of the crown of life, saying, “Life will become a crown. It will be the glory of the victorious martyrs” (135). For those who are martyred for the Lord, the resurrection life within them will become a crowning feature in their testimony of the resurrected Christ’s operation of life within them. Such a crown of glory was evident in the face of Stephen at the time of his martyrdom (Acts 6:15).

With a crowning testimony of the resurrection life, the overcomers in Smyrna will also be rewarded by not being hurt by the second death. Witness Lee draws a distinction between the organic operation of the divine life that shields the overcomers from the permanent punishment reserved for those who do not have the life of God through unbelief and the temporary dispensational punishment reserved for those believers who are not adequately constituted with the divine life:

Because of the fall and the entering in of sin, every man must die once (Heb. 9:27). This first death, however, is not the final settlement. All the dead, except those who through faith in the Lord Jesus have been recorded in the book of life, will be resurrected and will pass through the judgment of the great white throne at the close of the millennium, i.e., at the conclusion of the old heaven and old earth. As a result of this judgment, the condemned ones will all be cast into the lake of fire, which is the second death as the final settlement ([Rev.] 20:11-15). Hence, the second death is God’s dealing with man after man’s death and resurrection. Since the overcomers will have overcome death through their faithfulness unto death under persecution and will require no further dealing by God after their resurrection, they will be rewarded with the crown of life and will no longer be touched by death after their resurrection. (*Recovery Version*, Rev. 2:11, note 2)

The Lord’s reward to the overcomers in the church in Smyrna reveals that the overcomers will not be hurt of the second death (v. 11), because of their organic expression of Christ’s crowning organic resurrection life. In contrast to the overcomers, some

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believers during the millennial kingdom will be hurt of the second death, but only dispensationally rather than eternally, unlike the unbelievers. These overcomers will bear the organic adornment of the divine resurrection life as a crown. Thus, they will eternally display life's victory over death and its sting (1 Cor. 15:55). The display of not being hurt by the second death will commence with the start of the millennial kingdom.

### The Rewards to the Overcomers in Pergamos

In the Lord's speaking to the church in Pergamos, He praised them for holding fast His name and not denying His faith (Rev. 2:13), but He also rebuked them for tolerating some who held the teaching of Balaam and the teaching of the Nicolaitans. The teaching of Balaam opens the way for the defilement of both flesh (fornication) and spirit (idol worship) (2 Cor. 7:1), and the teaching of the Nicolaitans opens the way for human hierarchies in the church that damage the building up of the church as the organic Body of Christ. To those who overcome these degrading tendencies, the Lord promised to give them "the hidden manna, and...a white stone, and upon the stone a new name written, which no one knows except him who receives it" (Rev. 2:17).

As with the promise of the tree of life, most commentators interpret the hidden manna as a literal, material supply of manna, reminiscent of the manna supplied to the children of Israel. Govett links a literal tree in verse 7 with a literal supply of manna in verse 17, saying, "There was a literal eating of manna: why not again?...Did we agree, that the tree of life is a literal tree? So then are its twelve kinds of fruits...If then the *fruit* be literal, so is the *manna*" (122). Bullinger goes further to link the eating of manna in the wilderness in Exodus with a literal eating of manna during the "wilderness" existence of the church in the last three and a half years of the great tribulation:

God supported His People in the wilderness, where they could obtain no food: Why not here?...Why should not God "furnish a table" (Ps. lxxviii. 19) for His own in that coming day, in that wilderness whither they will flee (Rev. xii. 14)? The one was literal: why not the other?...That manna was to be "hidden," and "kept," to remind them that God can still, and will again "furnish a table in the wilderness," that they may again be "nourished for a time, and times, and half a time" (Rev. xii. 14). (91)

In his misguided effort to justify a literal interpretation of the hidden manna, Bullinger errs on two levels. First, he fails to see that the reward of eating the hidden manna will be spiritually realized in the coming millennial kingdom, not physically realized in the period of time immediately prior to the second coming of the Lord. While there will be nourishment in the saints' wilderness experience during the great tribulation (12:6, 14), it will not be the hidden manna spoken of by the Lord in 2:17. Second, Bullinger fails to see that the reward of eating the hidden manna is given only to overcomers, not to those who have to pass through a wilderness experience in order to be matured and raptured at the sounding of the last trumpet immediately prior to the coming of the Lord.

With an emphasis on literal and material understandings of the hidden manna, it is rare for commentators to associate the hidden manna with Christ, who referred to Himself as the bread which came down when He spoke of the experience of the children of Israel in the Gospel of John, saying, "Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, and they died. This is the bread which comes down out of heaven, that anyone may eat of it and not die. I am the living bread which came down out of heaven; if anyone eats of this bread, he shall live forever" (6:49-51). Colclasure refers to these verses and identifies Christ with the hidden manna, saying, "We who overcome will receive the 'hidden manna,' Jesus Himself, 'the living bread that came down



out of heaven' (John 6:51)" (44). Osborne also refers to this passage in the Gospel of John, but he is less firm in his declaration that Christ Himself, first and foremost, is the hidden manna: "In John 6:35 Jesus said, 'I am the bread of life,' and so in one sense he is the hidden manna that is given to bring life. In this passage the primary idea is the bread of life that will be ours in the eternal kingdom" (59). To Osborne, Christ is the hidden manna only in "one sense," but the "primary idea" of the hidden manna is purportedly related to some undefined "bread of life" that is separate and apart from Christ who is ours even in this age. In *What the Spirit Says to the Churches: A Key to the Apocalypse of John*, Hubert J. Richards at least tries to speak of the hidden manna in a spiritual context, saying, "In a wealth of symbolism John promises them, in contrast with the idol-tainted foods he is asking them to forgo, a food which will give them the very life of God" (41), but it seems that his reference to the life of God is still associated with some form of physical food.

Since most interpretations of the hidden manna refer to physical and material manifestations, it is not surprising that the interpretations of the white stone follow the same pattern. In *Revelation Expounded, or Eternal Mysteries Simplified*, Finis Jennings Dake declares that the white stone is literal, saying that the overcomers "will also be given a white stone with a new name in it. The white stone was known to the ancient as a 'victory' stone. All these things are literal" (39). Alluding to the cultural context of paganism in the ancient world, in which white stones were used to obtain entrance to pagan festivals, Richards says, "In contrast with the white counter which would have allowed them admission into the pagan feasts," the white stone in Revelation 2:17 represents "an entrance ticket into heaven itself" (41). Osborne draws from the same cultural context and says that the white stone "refers to entrance to the messianic feast when we get to heaven" (59).

**T**hese material interpretations of the hidden manna and the white stone, looking beyond the Scriptures in some cases and missing the mark of God's economy as revealed in the Scriptures in other cases, fail to see the context of these rewards as they relate to the organic constitution of the saints as living stones for the organic building up of the church. In order to overcome the defilement brought in by the teaching of Balaam, the church needs to partake of Christ as the bread which comes down out of heaven, constituting the members of Christ with the sanctifying life of God. In this partaking there is a cleansing from all defilement of flesh and of spirit and the perfecting of holiness in the fear of God (2 Cor. 7:1). By partaking of Christ in this age as the bread of life, the saints, as living stones, are also built up as a spiritual house, which is the organic issue of the growth of the divine life in its expression as a holy temple in the Lord (1 Pet. 2:5; Eph. 2:21). The living stones' being built together into a dwelling place of God in spirit (v. 22) is in sharp contrast to the hierarchical systems produced by the teaching of the Nicolaitans. In this spiritual partaking and building, there is mutuality and function according to the gift of grace among all the members of the church as the Body of Christ. The organic building of the church is a corporate matter, but this corporate growth is rooted and grounded in the individual experience of the Lord's constitution within each member. These experiences bring in transformation, which is signified by the writing of a new name that is known only to the Lord and to the transformed overcomer.

The organic rewards of eating the hidden manna and being given a white stone with a new name in the millennial kingdom reflect and extend the organic experience of the overcomers in this age. In the millennial kingdom there will be a fuller organic partaking of Christ and an open manifestation of the building work of God, both individually and corporately. The hidden vistas of Christ, His length and breadth and height and depth, will be unveiled fully for the enjoyment of the overcomers when He becomes fully known to them (1 Cor. 13:12), and the mutual, corporate, organic indwelling of God in humanity and humanity in God will be manifested openly and spiritually.

**WITH AN EMPHASIS ON LITERAL AND MATERIAL UNDERSTANDINGS OF THE HIDDEN MANNA, IT IS RARE FOR COMMENTATORS TO ASSOCIATE THE HIDDEN MANNA WITH CHRIST, WHO REFERRED TO HIMSELF AS THE BREAD WHICH CAME DOWN WHEN HE SPOKE OF THE EXPERIENCE OF THE CHILDREN OF ISRAEL.**

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### The Reward to the Overcomers in Thyatira

In the epistle to the church in Thyatira, the Lord identified Himself in relation to His judgment: His eyes are like a flame of fire, and His feet are like shining bronze (Rev. 2:18). This judgment is deserved because the church has allowed the teaching of Jezebel and the authority that comes with that teaching to replace Christ's authority in the church (v. 20). In addition to deviating from God's authority, there is outright defiance in an unwillingness to repent (v. 21). In response to this defiance, the Lord's judgments are well deserved and unavoidable (vv. 22-23) because the Lord cannot tolerate the deep things of Satan having authority and influence in the church (v. 24). The overcomers in Thyatira do not hold the teaching of Jezebel or know the deep things of Satan; that is, they live under God's authority. By holding fast in the midst of corruption and defiance against God's authority, the overcomers are rewarded in the millennial kingdom with "authority over the nations" and will shepherd "them with an iron rod, as vessels of pottery are broken in pieces" (vv. 26-27).

It is easy to interpret the reward of authority as an objective bestowal of authority by Christ to the overcomers, as Colclasure does when he says, "Since Jesus has received 'all authority...in heaven and on earth' (Matt. 28:18), He is free to dispense a measure of that authority to us who have overcome through Him" (47). Actually, the authority that is given to the overcomers in the millennial kingdom comes out from their organic constitution with the divine life in this age. In the Scriptures God's divine authority always has its source in His divine life: God's image is the source of His dominion. All authority comes from the living God and is given by the living God (Rom. 13:1; 2 Cor. 10:8). Humanity has the capacity to receive the life of God, manifest Christ's image, and exercise God's authority because human beings have been made in the image and according to the likeness of God (Gen. 1:26). The Lord's reward to the overcomers in the church in Thyatira reveals that the overcomers will manifest the organic issue of receiving and being constituted with the divine life—the divine authority that is predicated on the divine life (Rev. 2:26-28).

### The Rewards to the Overcomers in Sardis

In His speaking to the church in Sardis, the Lord rebuked the church, saying, "You have a name that you are living, and yet you are dead" (3:1). The principal indication of degradation in Sardis is not sin but the presence of spiritual death, and there are only a few names in Sardis who have not defiled their garments with death and who walk in the white garments of righteousness and holiness with the Lord (v. 4). The church is charged to repent of its participation in the degradation related to spiritual death, and the rewards that are given to those who overcome reflect the organic absence of death in their living and in their standing before God. "He who overcomes will be clothed thus, in white garments, and I shall by no means erase his name out of the book of life, and I will confess his name before My Father and before His angels" (v. 5). The reward of white garments involves an organic acknowledgment that death is not present in any aspect of their living, and as such, their names cannot be erased from the book of life.

**B**oth of these rewards are based on organic realities, but it is easy for commentators to confuse the reward of white garments with material garments. Govett, for example, in speaking of the white garments, draws a comparison between these garments and the priestly garments in the Old Testament and suggests that the rewarded overcomers will be similarly arrayed: "As the Levites, clothed in fine white linen at the dedication of the temple by Solomon lifted up their voices in praise, and the glory of God filled the temple (2 Chron. v. 12—14), so the conquerors, arrayed in priestly robes, will rejoice in the presence of the Most High" (169). This seemingly spiritual explanation is simplistic, lacking depth. An overcomer in this age who walks with and

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in the Lord in righteousness and holiness surely will not be rewarded in the next age with material garments that could never compare to the organic expression of the righteousness and holiness of the reality (Eph. 4:24).

**I**t is equally easy for such commentators, who lack a clear understanding of the millennial kingdom, to offer imprecise interpretations related to the reward of not having one's name erased out of the book of life (Rev. 3:5). Some commentators skirt the issue with ethereal assertions, while others mistakenly equate the word *erase* with the loss of one's eternal salvation. Barnhouse accurately stands on the truth and eternal implications of God's righteous justification by faith by not equating one's name being erased from the book of life with the loss of eternal salvation. He acknowledges the difficult issue by posing a rhetorical question but then answers it according to the truth that a believer's eternal salvation is based on God's eternal forgiveness and justification.

Does this verse not teach that it is possible for one who has really been born again to lose his salvation? Such a problem could never arise in the minds of those who have a real knowledge of the comprehensiveness of salvation or the true meaning of justification. The problem will disappear when we realize the principle of Scriptural interpretation that no obscure passage should ever be quoted in contradiction to a clear line of Scriptural teaching for which there are plain statements and great masses of teaching. (71)

Here Barnhouse properly defends the truth of a believer's eternal salvation; it is regrettable, however, that he does so by relegating the truth related to one's name being erased to the status of an "obscure passage" in the latter part of his comments and then offers no satisfactory interpretation of what the Lord meant when He spoke of erasing. Surely, this promise is not insignificant to the Lord, and simply dismissing it as an obscure passage does not provide any light or comfort to those who encounter it and who are troubled by its presence in the Holy Scriptures.

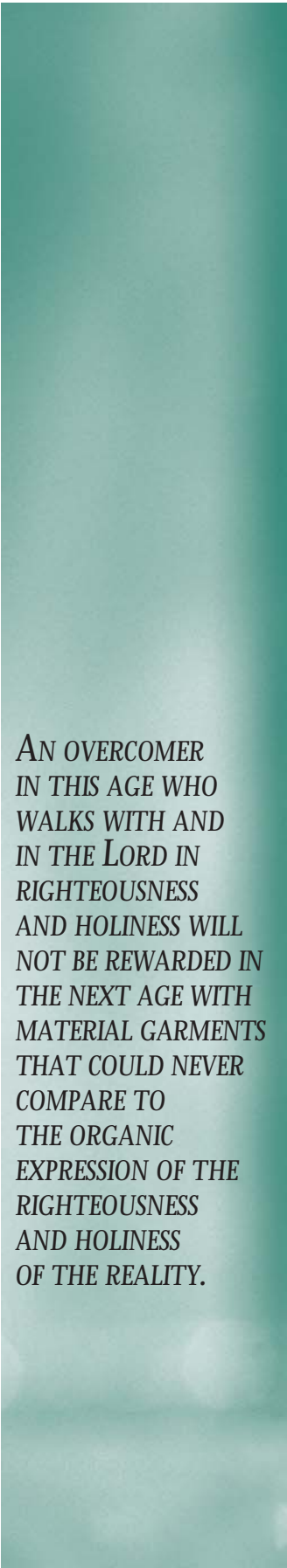
In a desire to address the meaning of erasure, but without an understanding of the millennial connection, other commentators offer explanations that are convoluted and unsatisfactory. R. C. H. Lenski in *The Interpretation of St. John's Revelation* says,

God is not bound by time and its succession so that he at one time enters a name and then at another time erases it. This fits our ideas of time, but our minds are lost when we apply this to eternity. It is useless to make the attempt, since it usually leads into error, since we cannot even think in terms of timelessness. Here the thought remains in the domain of time as the future tense "I shall not erase" shows. (135)

Despite acknowledging the possibility of names being erased, Lenski dissembles with an obtuse explanation that focuses on the timelessness and perhaps capriciousness of God's actions. There is some seeming profundity in Lenski's words but little that is applicable to a Christian concerned about whether or not his or her name will remain in the book of life. While the lack of specificity in their explanations of *erase* on the part of Barnhouse and Lenski detracts from their interpretations, their words at least do not suggest the notion that erasure implies the loss of eternal salvation, as does Osborne:

God sits on his judgment seat and has the authority over serious wrongdoers to "blot out" their names from the citizenship records of heaven. In the New Testament, to have names written in the book of life means to be citizens of heaven and children of God (Luke 10:20; Phil 4:3; Heb 12:23; Rev 13:8; 17:8; 21:27). The book of life contains the names and deeds of those who belong to God (Rev 20:12), and only those who are faithful will stay in it. To be erased or "blotted out" is a metaphor for removal and destruction. (88)

Osborne's interpretation is predicated on a false understanding of the limits of God's



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OF THE REALITY.**

righteousness. Even though God sits on His judgment seat, and His judgments are always based on righteousness, He is also righteously bound to honor Christ's righteous sacrifice on behalf of those who believe into Him. For God to eternally erase a believer's name from the book of life would be an unrighteous act on His part and an unrighteous rejection of the sinless sacrifice of Christ. God cannot eternally take away our heavenly citizenship or our life relationship with Him as children of God. However, He can temporarily discipline those who do not overcome, while still acknowledging and maintaining an eternal life relationship with them: "It is for discipline that you endure; God deals with you as with sons. For what son is there whom the father does not discipline?" (Heb. 12:7).

The discipline associated with having one's name erased from the book of life will occur in the coming millennial kingdom and extend only for the period of the millennial kingdom. Lee provides a balanced understanding of this verse in a lengthy footnote in the *Recovery Version* on the word *erase* in Revelation 3:5:

The entire verse is the Lord's promise to the overcomers. It will be fulfilled in the millennial kingdom after the Lord comes back. That a name is erased out of the book of life indicates that that name has already been written in the book of life. The book of life is a divine record of the names of those who partake of the blessings that God has prepared for them. The names of all the saints chosen by God and predestinated to partake of these blessings are written in this book (Luke 10:20). These blessings are in three stages: (1) in the church, (2) in the millennial kingdom, and (3) in eternity. The blessings in the stage of the church, such as forgiveness, redemption, regeneration, eternal life, the divine nature, etc., are the initial portions. All God's chosen ones whose names are written in the book of life have a share in these initial portions to begin their spiritual life. If they cooperate with God's supplying grace, they will mature in life in the church age, and this earlier maturity in life will constitute a prize with which the Lord will reward them at His coming back. That prize will be the entrance into the millennial kingdom and participation in the divine blessings in that stage, such as the joy and rest of the Lord (Matt. 25:21, 23; Heb. 4:9-11), the reign over the nations (2:26-27; 20:4, 6), etc., which God has prepared as an incentive for His chosen ones to go on with Him in the church age. However, many of His chosen ones, after receiving His forgiveness, redemption, eternal life, divine nature, etc., will not cooperate with His grace and will not go on with Him. Hence, they are unable to mature in life in the church age and thus will not be ready at the Lord's coming back to enter into the millennial kingdom and share in the divine blessings of that age as a prize. Therefore, during the millennial kingdom their names will be erased from the book of life. After being disciplined by the Lord and growing in life unto maturity during the millennial kingdom, they will share in the divine blessings in the stage of eternity, such as the eternal priesthood with God's eternal presence, the eternal kingship (22:3-5), the New Jerusalem, the tree of life (22:14), the water of life (22:17), etc. At that time their names should again be written in the book of life. This means that all God's chosen ones whose names are written in the book of life and who have been brought into the participation of the divine blessings in the stage of the church "shall by no means perish forever" (John 10:28); that is, they shall by no means lose the divine blessings of eternity. But some, those who do not cooperate with the Lord in the church age, will be dispensationally disciplined by the Lord during the millennial kingdom and will miss the divine blessings in that stage. (Note 3)

Although Govett lacks the clarity of Lee, he proffers a similar understanding of having one's name erased from the book of life, stating, "I have no better solution to propose, than that there may be a temporary blotting out of the name of the believer from the book of life, during the period of reward enjoyed by the others; and a restoration of the name, ere the final award settles the position of each for ever" (171). The reward of not having one's name erased is an organic validation and acknowledgment that no place has been given by the overcomer to the devil (Eph. 4:27), who is the source of death.

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The Lord's reward to the overcomers in the church in Sardis reveals that the overcomers will be organically adorned in righteousness and holiness, as represented by the organic reward of a white garment, and thus, they will also be organically acknowledged by the uninterrupted inclusion of their names in the book of life and the Lord's confession (Rev. 3:5). They will manifest the organic expression of the righteous and holy nature of God's divine life, and they will enjoy an uninterrupted fellowship with the living One who confesses His identification with them.

### The Rewards to the Overcomers in Philadelphia

In His speaking to the church in Philadelphia, the church of brotherly love, the Lord identified Himself as "the Holy One, the true One, the One who has the key of David, the One who opens and no one will shut, and shuts and no one opens" (v. 7). He praised them for keeping the word of His endurance, for which He will keep them "out of the hour of trial, which is about to come on the whole inhabited earth, to try them who dwell on the earth" (v. 10).

*Trial* here undoubtedly denotes the great tribulation (Matt. 24:21), which is about to come on the whole inhabited earth...The Lord promised the recovered church that He would keep her out of the hour of trial (not only out of the trial, but out of the *hour* of trial) because she has kept the word of the Lord's endurance. This promise of the Lord, like His promise in Luke 21:36, indicates that the saints who keep the word of the Lord's endurance will be raptured before the great trial, implying that those who do not keep the word of the Lord's endurance will be left in the trial. (Lee, *Recovery Version*, Rev. 3:10, note 2)

The association of Philadelphia with the imminence of the rapture indicates that the emergence of the reality of the church in Philadelphia will be closely followed by the Lord's second coming; in fact, the realization of Philadelphia may be the economic impetus for the Lord to return. Before the Lord's return, the overcomers are already in possession of a crown (v. 11); that is, the church possesses the glory that incentivizes the Lord to come and present such a glorious church to Himself, with the church not having spot or wrinkle or any such things, being holy and without blemish (Eph. 5:27). The attaining of a glorious crown by the church fulfills the goal of God's corporate choosing in eternity past of those who would be holy and without blemish before Him in love (1:4). In her holy and glorious condition the church in Philadelphia matches and organically manifests the life and nature of the Holy One primarily in her testimony of brotherly love, a love that is of God, who is love (1 John 4:7-8). Thus, the overcomers, who hold fast to what they already have, are qualified to receive the organic rewards promised to those who overcome (Rev. 3:11). The Lord spoke of these organic rewards, saying, "Him I will make a pillar in the temple of My God, and he shall by no means go out anymore, and I will write upon him the name of My God and the name of the city of My God, the New Jerusalem, which descends out of heaven from My God, and My new name" (v. 12). The Lord's rewards to the overcomers in the church in Philadelphia reveal that the overcomers will be organically joined as one to the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb as the temple (21:22). This oneness will be a coinhering oneness; that is, it will involve the mutual indwelling of God in redeemed, regenerated, and glorified humanity and this same uplifted humanity in God (cf. John 14:20; 17:21-23). The overcomers will be rewarded with a foretaste of this eternal coinhering oneness and will by no means be separate from God in reality, realization, or experience; that is, they will not go out anymore (Rev. 3:12). This coinhering oneness is also indicated by the Lord's word that the overcomers will have "the name of My God and the name of the city of My God, the New Jerusalem, which descends out of heaven from My God, and My new name" (v. 12). A name always represents the person, and to have these three names indicates that the overcomers possess the reality of God, the New Jerusalem, and the Lord.

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IN SARDIS REVEALS  
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INCLUSION OF  
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IN THE BOOK  
OF LIFE AND THE  
LORD'S CONFESSION.

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The name of God denotes God Himself, the name of the New Jerusalem denotes the city itself, and the name of the Lord denotes the Lord Himself. That the name of God, the name of the New Jerusalem, and the name of the Lord are written upon the overcomer indicates that what God is, the nature of the New Jerusalem, and the person of the Lord have all been wrought into the overcomer. (Lee, *Recovery Version*, v. 12, note 3)

When the metaphor of writing is used in the New Testament in a spiritual sense, as in 2 Corinthians 3:3, which says, “Since you are being manifested that you are a letter of Christ ministered by us, inscribed not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God; not in tablets of stone but in tablets of hearts of flesh,” it implies an organic impartation and constitution of the divine life through the Spirit of the living God. Thus, the writing of new names upon the overcomers implies that in nature, constitution, and expression, the overcomers are organically identified with God, with the Lamb, and with the corporate enlargement of the Triune God, the New Jerusalem. This organic expression will be manifested to the world at the initiation of the millennial kingdom, at which time the world will surely know that God and redeemed, regenerated, and glorified humanity truly have been perfected into one (John 17:23).

Commentators often offer low interpretations not befitting these marvelous organic rewards. When commenting on the name of the New Jerusalem being written on the overcomers, Barnhouse states that this writing is “a mark that they are citizens of Heaven” (78). Brighton applies the same notion of citizenship, saying, “One’s citizenship in the heavenly kingdom of God is confirmed by the name of God, the name of the new Jerusalem, and by Christ’s new name being written upon the child of God” (95). In speaking of the promise of being made a pillar in the temple of God, Govett applies a material interpretation, saying, “There is also in the heaven a *real material temple*, reared by God, into which the ascended members of the church of Christ are introduced” (198). It is hard to understand how the mere acknowledgment of citizenship in the heavens is a reward worthy of the experience of overcoming when all believers in this age have this status and assurance already, being no longer strangers and sojourners but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God (Eph. 2:19). And it is equally hard to understand how entrance into a material temple constitutes a meaningful reward when God desires that the church would be a holy temple in the Lord and a dwelling place of God in spirit (vv. 21-22). Without an organic understanding of the rewards given to the overcomers in the church in Philadelphia, we trivialize the name of God, the name of the New Jerusalem, and the name of the Lord, and when the Lord specifically praises the church for not denying His name (Rev. 3:8), this is not a small matter.

### The Reward to the Overcomers in Laodicea

In His speaking to the church in Laodicea, the church of degradation, the Lord identified Himself as “the Amen, the faithful and true Witness, the beginning of the creation of God” (v. 14). The Lord had no words of praise for the Laodiceans but only an accurate appraisal and witness of their lukewarmness and spiritual pride (vv. 15-17), which left them “wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked” (v. 17). For their sake, the Lord reassured them that His rebuking words of discipline come out of His love (v. 19), and they are encouraged to respond to His knocking on the door of the church (v. 20). Those who respond to His knocking by opening to Him will be rewarded with sitting with Him on His throne in the millennial kingdom, just as He sat with the Father on His throne in His overcoming (v. 21).

The promised rewards to the overcomers in Laodicea and in Thyatira are related to matters of divine authority. The overcomers in Thyatira are given authority over the nations (2:26), and the overcomers in Laodicea share the throne of authority with the Lord (3:21). The former reward speaks of the realm of authority; the latter reward

speaks of the source of authority. The nations will be ruled not based on an objective bestowal of authority but based on the authority that comes from the overcomers' being organically incorporated into the reigning Christ. The overcomers will sit with Him on His throne; that is, they will not be separate from Him, and thus, they will not be separate from His inherent authority. The promise to the overcomers is not an objective throne but the subjective sharing in the One to whom all authority in heaven and on earth has been given (Matt. 28:18). And during the millennial kingdom this shared authority of Christ and shared authority with Christ will be manifested to all the nations.

### An Organic Pursuit for Organic Rewards

All the rewards promised to the overcomers are based on the believers' experience of God's organic salvation. Our objective reconciliation and justification through faith in Christ qualify us to receive the divine life, and they are the necessary initiation of a process of growing in the divine life unto maturity, which maturity is measured not by ethical perfection but by the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ that we personally experience and manifest in our practical daily living. Without this growth we will leave our first love, be defeated in trials and suffering, hold to defiling practices and human hierarchies, be unrepentant, be spiritually dead, be lax in holding to the things that we have received, and be spiritually proud and lukewarm. In such a condition, there will be no organic overcoming and no organic rewards. In each situation of degradation, however, we can pursue the growth in the divine life so that the organic resurrection life of God, the life of the living One and the life that is in the living One, will prevail in us to overcome and bring us into the organic rewards promised to the overcomers in the millennial kingdom. **AF**

### Notes

<sup>1</sup>God's organic salvation produces an individual manifestation of maturity in the overcomers, and it will also produce a corporate manifestation of maturity in the Body of Christ, the corporate composition of the enlarged Christ in the church (1 Cor. 12:12). These individual and corporate manifestations are connected: The individual manifestations are part of the corporate manifestation. The corporate manifestation of God's organic operation in the church as the Body of Christ is the ultimate consummation of God's eternal intention.

<sup>2</sup>The organic rewards are granted to the overcomers in the seven churches. And while these churches, as spoken of in other articles in this issue, represent historical stages of the church's development in the history of the world, some of which have passed, including the stage of Ephesus, the stage of Smyrna, and the stage of Pergamos, the rewards promised to the overcomers, both then and now, I believe, remain. Just because the teaching of Balaam in Pergamos to eat idol sacrifices and commit fornication has been subsumed by the teachings and leading of Jezebel in Thyatira does not mean that the particular potential for degradation revealed to the church in Pergamos is no longer an applicable warning to the believers today. We need to be on the alert that this Pergamonian tendency would not manifest itself in our experience; it is in this way that we can avoid the Thyatirian practice in our experience. If we do this, the organic rewards that were directed toward the churches in the early stages of the church's development will still, in principle, be applicable to us today.

<sup>3</sup>My comments related to the organic nature of the rewards to the overcomers are by no means intended to be definitive or exhaustive. Rather, they are merely suggestive, and although these rewards are seen through a mirror obscurely (1 Cor. 13:12), they are based on a conviction that the Triune God's eternal economy to impart Himself as the eternal life into His chosen and redeemed people should inform and supersede all other considerations when it comes to the interpretation of Scripture. The outworking of this eternal economy is most clearly and succinctly presented in Ephesians 1, which begins in eternity past in the heart of the Triune God and ends with the church, the recipient of the eternal life of God, being the fullness of the One

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NAME, THIS IS NOT  
A SMALL MATTER.

who fills all in all. A special part of this filling is the experience of the organic rewards given to the overcomers.

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### The Significance of the Number Seven in Revelation

The book of Revelation speaks of four “sevens”: seven churches, seven seals, seven trumpets, and seven bowls (1:11; 5:1; 8:2; 16:1). The number seven can be composed of three plus four or four plus three. The number seven as it relates to the churches is composed of three plus four because the Lord’s coming is not mentioned in the first three epistles to the churches; it is mentioned in the latter four epistles (2:25; 3:3, 11, 20), indicating that the latter four churches will remain until the Lord comes. This shows that there are only four expressions of the church today: Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea. Thus, in relation to the churches, seven is composed of three plus four. Three is the number of God, and four is the number of created man. The church is first three then four, because the church was of God when it began at Pentecost, but toward its end it becomes more of man. For example, *Laodicea* in Greek means “the opinion of the people.”

In relation to the seals, trumpets, and bowls, the number seven is composed of four plus three. The seven seals, seven trumpets, and seven bowls relate to judgment...Judgment begins with four—that is, it begins with man being judged—and eventually reaches three—that is, it brings in God. Before God’s judgment the element of man is without the element of God; however, the more God judges, the more the universe belongs to Him. In the end, after passing through all the judgments of God, the universe will be filled with the element of God.

From “The Future of the Church” by Witness Lee in *The Collected Works of Witness Lee*, 1955, vol. 2, p. 513