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A0642 – October 15, 2006 – Rev 21:7-8 – The Overcomers & The Defeated

Revelation 21:7 The one overcoming (PAPart) shall inherit these things and I will be (1SFMI) his God and he will be (3SFMI) to Me a son.

As always, the **overcomer** in Revelation refers to one who is a victor in battle (Rev 2:7, 11, 17, 26; 3:5, 12, 21; 5:5; 11:7; 13:7; 17:14; 21:7). In this context it refers to believers in Rev 2-3 who persevere and overcome the obstacles Christ highlights in those letters. The means of overcoming is obedience to Christ's commands. If they overcome then they will be rewarded. Inheriting **these things** is a reward for obedience to Christ's commands. Since not all believers obey Christ's commands not all believers will **inherit these things**. Two rewards are mentioned here for the overcomer. First, the overcomer will **inherit these things**, that is, he will inherit the new Jerusalem. This does not mean he will merely enter the new Jerusalem or live in the new Jerusalem. If I say "I entered the house" it is very different from saying "I inherited the house". Everyone knows the difference between entering a house and inheriting a house. In the same way there is a difference between entering the new Jerusalem and inheriting the new Jerusalem. Many will enter the city but only the **overcomer will inherit** the city. The word **inherit** must be given its full sense. It is the Greek word *kleronomeo* and means "share", "possession" or "ownership". In other words, the believer who overcomes shall "possess" the new Jerusalem. He will actually have his residence in the new Jerusalem. Not all believers will reside in the new Jerusalem. Many will reside outside the city on the new earth and will bring their glory and the glory of the nations into it (Rev 21:24-26). But the **overcomer** will have a permanent residence inside the new Jerusalem in close contact with the Lamb who is its holy of holies (i.e. temple, *naos*).

Second, Jesus promises the overcomer that **I will be his God and he will be to Me a son**. Note that this sonship is a reward and not something all believers will enjoy. Scripturally, there are two sonships. *First*, all believers enjoy a *present sonship* by virtue of meeting the sole requirement of faith alone in Christ alone (Gal 3:26). *Second*, however, only some believers are rewarded with a *future sonship* which is attained by meeting the requirement of obedience to Christ when faced with obstacles. When a son of God perseveres in obedience to His heavenly Father then the Father is proud to be called **His God** and bestows on him the reward of *future sonship*. Future sonship as a reward for obedience is taught in other passages of Scripture. For example, in Matt 5:9 it is the believers who are peacemakers who are rewarded with the title “sons of God”. Not all believers are peacemakers so not all will be rewarded with this title. (see Matt 5:12 which denotes rewards context). In Rom 8:14 the “sons of God” are those who are led by the Spirit. Not all believers submit to the leading of the Spirit so not all will be rewarded with this title. In Rom 8:19 the creation eagerly awaits the revealing of the “sons of God”. These are those believers who will co-reign with Christ over all creation. All these contexts, including Rev 21:7, are speaking of the reward of *future sonship* received only by believers who overcome.

It is interesting that the phrase **I will be his God and he will be to Me a son** is rooted in the OT where God promised David’s son, Solomon, “I will be a father to him and he will be a son to Me” (2 Sam 7:14). Surely God was the father of all OT believers. However, God was promising that He and Solomon would have a special, intimate Father-son relationship. This same intimate Father-son relationship is what the overcomers are being rewarded with here. When a believer perseveres in this life and overcomes he is rewarded with a special, intimate sonship in the new Jerusalem, This promise is limited to the overcomer. It is not for all believers.

If you are still struggling with this concept let’s explain it a bit further and hopefully it will open up for you. The text says **I will be his God**. Now, isn’t God the God of all believers? Yes, then how can this be a reward for the overcomer in the future? In this way, at the moment a person believes in Jesus Christ he has a spiritual birth and becomes, by position, a son of God (Gal 3:26). However, at that point it has yet to be seen what that son does in

experience. So, while he will always be a part of the family (eternal security) he may turn out to be either an obedient or disobedient son. If the son is disobedient then, according to Heb 11:16, God is ashamed to be called his God. However, if a son is obedient then surely God is proud to be called his God. So, being born into the family of God is much like being born into a human family and that's why God gave us a human family, so we could learn from our human family about being in God's family. At the moment a child is born into a human family the father is a proud daddy. He has a new child. The child is His child by physical birth and that child will always be a part of his family. However, after the child grows up he may turn out to be a disobedient child. If so, the father's pride in his child will likely diminish and eventually he will be ashamed of him. God the Father is the same way. In the end, God the Father is proud of His obedient sons and ashamed of His disobedient sons. Therefore, in heaven only obedient believers, overcomers, will be rewarded with this special, intimate sonship. This is why they dwell in the new Jerusalem and not outside. In the city they will be very close to God for they are sons *indeed!* Disobedient believers will live outside the city and though they can come into the city they do not have permanent dwellings inside the city close to the Lamb and God.

There is an example of this in the Book of Hebrews with Abraham who, by faithful obedience left all he knew and went to a land promised to him by God which he had never seen. Abraham was looking for a heavenly city whose architect and builder was God. He was looking for the new Jerusalem (Heb 11:8-16)! Abraham was heavenly-minded and this led to a life of obedience to God. As a result God was not ashamed to be called the God of Abraham. On the other hand we have Esau who was so earthly-minded he sold his inheritance for a bowl of soup (Heb 12:16-17). He could not see past his next meal! God had an inheritance for Esau but Esau forfeited it. The bottom line is that God has allotted an inheritance for all his sons. However, if we are earthly-minded like Esau then this leads to a life of disobedience and we forfeit our reward and inheritance. God is ashamed to be called the God of the earthly-minded believer. On the other hand, if we are heavenly-minded like Abraham then we will earn our reward and receive an inheritance. God is proud to be called the God of the heavenly-minded believer. The heavenly-minded believer is the overcomer. Sometimes a person says, "You're so heavenly minded your no earthly good" but in reality it is just the reverse, "Those who are so earthly minded are no heavenly good". So, Jesus is saying,

I will be proud to be the God of the heavenly minded believer who by faithful obedience perseveres through this world. In the new Jerusalem that believer will be a son of God indeed.

Therefore, two classes of believers are clearly set forth in verses 6 and 7. Verse 6 describes all who had faith in Christ and received eternal life freely, without cost. Verse 7 describes those who were heavenly-minded, obedient believers. Thus, the promise of inheriting the new Jerusalem and future sonship are rewards for the believer who overcomes. Don't misunderstand me, this does not mean that believer's who don't overcome will have tears or mourning or crying. None of that is present in the new heavens and new earth. In fact, all believers will be in the new heavens and new earth and all will have a full cup of joy! The only difference is that some believers will have a larger cup than others!

Revelation 21:8 But the cowardly and unfaithful [not unbelieving] and abominable (PerfMPart) and murderers and fornicators and sorcerers and idolaters and all the liars, their part [is] in the lake, the burning (PPPart) fire and brimstone, this is (3SPAI) the second death."

A stark contrast is given in verse 8. It's very difficult to tell if this is a description of believers or unbelievers. I lean toward the view that what we have here is a description of believers who did not overcome. God is trying to motivate believers (especially those of Rev 2-3) to overcome their obstacles. I have several reasons for leaning this way but remember, we're dealing with a very advanced portion of Scripture and I don't want to be dogmatic. Nevertheless, it seems that verses 6, 7, and 8 are all dealing with believers. Verse 6 is saying salvation is a free gift received at the moment of faith alone in Christ alone. Verse 7 is describing the believer who overcomes, his inheritance and sonship. Verse 8 is describing the believer who fails and the loss of his inheritance. So, you have to observe very carefully as you read verse 8. It does not say these people are cast into the lake of fire. I realize that the NIV and some other translations say their place is in the lake...but it is actually **their part**, *meros*, which is another word denoting one's portion or inheritance. It, not they, will be in the lake of fire. It seems that John is done seeing people thrown in the lake of fire. That theme ended in Rev 20:15. Now we are dealing with the new heavens and new earth, the new Jerusalem

and the believer's position in the new heaven and new earth. Everyone does not share the same position in the new heaven and new earth. There are so many Scriptural themes coming together here it is very difficult. You have to know a lot of Scripture to be able to figure this out and I'm not saying, dogmatically that you have to agree with me here. I still have questions. I'm just giving you my best. What is clear in verse 8 is that the people who do these things are not cast into the lake of fire. Rather, **their part** is cast into the lake of fire. So, the words **their part** is the Greek word *meros* and here it refers to their "inheritance".

Turn to John 13 to see how this word is used elsewhere of genuine believers not having "part" with Christ. This is the foot-washing episode during the Last Supper in the Upper Room, the night Christ was betrayed.

John 13:3-11 *Jesus*, knowing that the Father had given all things into His hands, and that He had come forth from God and was going back to God, ⁴ got up from supper, and laid aside His garments; and taking a towel, He girded Himself. ⁵ Then He poured water into the basin, and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel with which He was girded. ⁶ So He came to Simon Peter. He said to Him, "Lord, do You wash my feet?" ⁷ Jesus answered and said to him, "What I do you do not realize now, but you will understand hereafter." ⁸ Peter said to Him, "Never shall You wash my feet!" Jesus answered him, "If I do not wash you, you have no part with Me." ⁹ Simon Peter said to Him, "Lord, *then wash* not only my feet, but also my hands and my head." ¹⁰ Jesus said to him, "He who has bathed needs only to wash his feet, but is completely clean; and you are clean, but not all *of you.*" ¹¹ For He knew the one who was betraying Him; for this reason He said, "Not all of you are clean."

Two things are pictured here; taking a bath and washing the feet. Jesus distinguished these two things. Peter rebuked Jesus for trying to wash his feet but when Jesus said if I do not wash you then you have no part with Me this brought about Peter's response that he wanted Jesus to give him a bath. Jesus said he didn't need a bath because he was already clean, all of them except Judas, the betrayer. Ok, so taking a bath refers to having a relationship with God through faith alone in Christ alone. However, footwashing portrays being in fellowship with God and Christ. Jesus said, "If

I do not wash your feet you have no part with Me". That is, you are not in fellowship with Me and apart from Me you can do nothing (John 15:4), that is, nothing worthy of reward. So, you can see how vital it is to stay in fellowship, undergo daily cleansing from sin by confession. If we do this then it tends to lead toward reward. So, here I hope you can see how it is possible for a genuine believer to have no part with Christ. Every time we get out of fellowship we have no part with Christ. And if we remain out of fellowship then we walk in the flesh and we produce the fruit of the flesh and that is what is described in Rev 21:8, the fruit of the flesh (see Gal 5:19-21). So, I take it that the people who do these things listed in Rev 21:8 are genuine believers who forfeited their inheritance. They lived a fleshly life and now they don't have any inheritance in the new Jerusalem. They will be in the new heavens and new earth, they may even go in and out of the city but they will not have a permanent dwelling in the city. They will enjoy the quality of eternal life described in verse 6 along with all other believers but they are not overcomers. They have forfeited their inheritance.

The idea that one can forfeit his inheritance is founded in the OT. The firstborn son was given a double portion or inheritance by virtue of his birthright. For example, if there were five sons then the father's inheritance would be divided into six portions. The firstborn son would receive two portions and the other four would each receive one portion.

INHERITANCE IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

Example: If a man had five sons he would divide the inheritance into six portions and give the firstborn a double portion

1.	2 Portions
2.	1 Portion
3.	1 Portion
4.	1 Portion
5.	1 Portion

*If the firstborn was a disobedient son or he sold his inheritance he was disinherited.

However, we also learn that a firstborn son could forfeit his inheritance. Many times the double portion went to a son who was not the firstborn. For example, Reuben was the firstborn son of Jacob but the double portion went to Joseph through his sons Ephraim and Manasseh (Gen 49). The father had the right to disinherit a rebellious son and give the double portion to an obedient son. This is what Jacob did. Also, the firstborn son could forfeit his

inheritance by selling it. This is what Esau did. By virtue of being the firstborn he had the birthright but he sold it to Jacob for a bowl of soup (Gen 25:8ff). Esau was disinherited. Now, when we apply this to the Christian life we can understand.

When a person places faith alone in Christ alone he has his spiritual birth. By virtue of spiritual birth God gives the believer an inheritance. However, this inheritance can be forfeited by a life of disobedience while a life of obedience will secure it. Rev 21:8 seems to be saying that these believers' lives were characterized by disobedience and therefore they forfeited their inheritance. They themselves will be in the new heavens and new earth but they will not have an inheritance in the new Jerusalem. They are not overcomers.

Now, let's deal with the details of verse 8. First, it begins with the word **But**, and the Greek word *de* is used. This is not the strongest Greek word for a contrast, *allo*. So, the contrast does not seem to be between believers and unbelievers but between believers who overcome and believers who fail. It should be noted that not all defeated believers have all of these characteristics. They may have only one or a few but nonetheless, what is clear is they are not overcomers. First, some believers are characterized as **cowardly**, *deilois*. The cowardly believer is the one who shrinks back from confessing Christ when given the opportunity to do so. Peter did this three times when he denied Christ. This did not mean he was not a believer. It simply meant that he was at that time a cowardly believer. After Pentecost he became a bold believer and was characterized that way the rest of his life. A believer can be a coward his whole life. If he is he will forfeit reward. Second, some believers are characterized as **unbelieving**, *apistois*, but in the context this should be translated **unfaithful**. An **unfaithful** believer would be like a believer in Smyrna who was imprisoned. Jesus told them to be faithful unto death and he would reward them with the crown of life (Rev 2:10). If a believer's life is characterized by unfaithfulness they will lose their reward. Third, some believers are characterized as **abominable**, *ebdelugmenois*. These are believers who permitted themselves (Perfect Passive Participle) to be polluted by the world system. The believer has been called out of the world system and is not to be polluted by the world system. These believers have failed in this respect and will lose their reward. Fourth, some believers are characterized as **murderers**, *phoneusin*. Believers

commit murder by hating another believer as well as by actually murdering someone. The word of God gives examples of believers who murdered others (e.g. Moses, David, Cain). When you get to heaven you will meet believers who murdered others. Those characterized by inner hatred or physical murder will not be rewarded (1 John 3:10-15). Fifth, some believers are characterized as **fornicators**, *pornois*. This word refers to a broad range of sexual immorality. Clearly, and unfortunately, believers are often engaged in sexual immorality. The believers at Thyatira (Rev 2:20-22) and Pergamum (Rev 2:14) were warned against being involved in sexual immorality. The divorce rate among believers in America is apparently higher than that of the unbelieving world. Those characterized this way will lose their reward. Sixth, some believers are characterized as **sorcerers**, *pharmakon*. From the Greek *pharmakon* we get “pharmacy”. The word may refer to “drug use” which is often associated with occultic practices such as sorcery. Unfortunately again, believers are all too occasionally engaged in drug use and sorcery. If they are characterized this way they will lose their reward. Seventh, some believers are characterized as **idolaters**, *eidololatriais*. There are many examples of believers who were involved in idolatry in the Bible. In 1 John 5:21 believers are warned to “guard themselves from idols”. Obviously they will not have reward. Lastly, some believers are characterized as **liars**, *pseudos*. Obviously believers can and are often characterized as **liars**. For example, Ananias and Sapphira lied to God the Spirit (Acts 5:1-10) Some believers seem to never be able to get rid of these old carnal ways of walking. Since believers can choose to walk by the flesh (Gal 5:19-21) or by the Spirit (Gal 5:22-23) what we have here is a description of believers who chose to spend their Christian lives walking by the flesh. A similar list is recorded in Gal 5:19-21 and 1 Cor 6:9-10 where believers are warned that if they walk this way then they will not “inheriting the kingdom”. Again, inheriting the kingdom does not mean entering but having ownership and rule in the kingdom. Believers who continually walk in the flesh will enter the kingdom but they will not inherit it. In addition, believers who are characterized as cowardly, unfaithful, sorcerers, etc...will have their part/their inheritance cast in the lake of fire. That is, they forfeited their inheritance. God graciously allotted them an inheritance at the moment of their spiritual birth but their disobedience resulted in forfeiting it. They are like Esau who forfeited his inheritance. Like Esau they were so earthly-minded that their lives were overrun by disobedience. They will be disinherited. Like the prodigal son who ran off and squandered his inheritance. When he returned home he was received into the

family. There was even a great celebration. However, there was no more inheritance for him, he had already spent it. In a similar way to Esau and the prodigal son, these believers will not have an inheritance in the new heaven and new earth.

Nevertheless, this is not to say they will not have joy in the new heavens and new earth. We have already found that there will be no more tears, or mourning or crying. In the new heavens and new earth everyone will have a full cup of joy. The only difference is there will be some who have a larger cup! This idea of different degrees of joy is already something you and I have experienced in our daily lives. All of our joyful experiences are joyful but they vary in degree of joy. For example, if you won \$1000 you would be joyful. However, if you won \$5,000,000 you would experience greater joy. Everyone will have a full cup of joy in the new heavens and new earth. The only difference will be the degree of joy experienced.

Now, you don't have to take verse 8 that way, you may want to say it refers to unbelievers. But I take it this way for three basic reasons. *First*, he's done talking about the people cast in the lake of fire. He finished that in Rev 20:15. We already know where they are. Why would he be telling us again? It seems a bit monotonous to tell us where they are. Besides, now he's moved to discussing those in the new heaven and new earth and their position there. *Second*, it doesn't say THEY will be cast in the lake of fire, it says THEIR PART will be in the lake of fire. If you have the NIV it may say "their place is the lake of fire" but that is an interpretation not a formal translation. The Greek word for "part", *meros*, is a word related to their "inheritance", their "lot", their "portion". It seems that when a person has faith in Christ God allots to him an inheritance. He even gives him everything he needs to earn that inheritance. He gives spiritual assets; the Spirit, spiritual gifts, the word of God, every spiritual blessing, 1 John 1:9, etc.... If the believer squanders all that God gives him by living a life of disobedience then the believer forfeits his inheritance. *Third*, this verse contrasts defeated believers with overcoming believers of the previous verse. Since the promises to overcomers in Revelation clearly concern rewards the two verses are contrasting those who have rewards with those who forfeited reward. It is ridiculous to think that all believers will end up the same in the eternal state. That would mean that it really doesn't matter what we do *after* we believe in Christ. It doesn't matter if we use our spiritual gifts or not. It doesn't matter whether we obey

His commandments or not. It doesn't matter whether we walk by faith or sight. It doesn't matter whether we stay in fellowship or not. It doesn't matter whether we abide or not. It doesn't matter whether we walk by the Spirit or not because in the end we're all the same. Such a view makes history very insignificant. So, just as Christ overcame and was rewarded so those who have overcome by faith in the Son of God are called to overcome obstacles by obedience to Christ's commandments and be richly rewarded.

[Back To The Top](#)