

# Overcoming and Enduring

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## Introduction

We continue exploring passages in Scripture that are often misunderstood and used to teach something different from their original meaning. Usually, this happens because the passage is taken out of context. Many of these misunderstandings are connected to salvation. The expositor sees a “trigger word” like “save” and quickly assumes the passage is about soteriology, when it may actually be addressing a different topic. The most common mistake is that a believer can lose their salvation. However, we know that is not possible. To refresh your memory, I offer these proof texts to clearly demonstrate the truth that once saved, always saved.

**John 10:27** My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. <sup>28</sup> I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and **no one** will snatch them out of my hand. <sup>29</sup> My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father’s hand.

**Romans 8:38** For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, <sup>39</sup> nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

**1 John 5:11** And this is the testimony, that God gave us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. <sup>12</sup> Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life. <sup>13</sup> I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life.

**Romans 8:29** For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. <sup>30</sup> And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified.

**Hebrews 10:14** For by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified.

And Jude 24–25; Ephesians 1:13–14; Philippians 1:6; 1 Peter 1:3–5; John 6:37–40

You get the picture ...

There are two English words, with a few variations, that are usually linked to these “confusing” passages. They are “overcome” and “endure.” I have categorized the passages we will be examining into two groups based on these two words.

## Overcome

“Overcome” is the Greek word *nikao*, which means to conquer, prevail, or achieve victory. It is often translated as “conquer.” When used of Christians, it signifies that they hold fast to their faith even unto death against the power of their foes, temptations, or persecutions. That is the most common idea the word expresses in Scripture.

## Revelation 2:5-7

**Revelation 2:5** Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent, and do the works you did at first. If not, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place, unless you repent. <sup>6</sup> Yet this you have: you hate the works of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate. <sup>7</sup> He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To the one who **conquers** (*nikao*) I will grant to eat of the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God.’

This passage is from the letters to the Seven Churches in Revelation. This one addresses the first church in the series, the church at Ephesus. The overall context of these letters is that they are seen to depict the period we call the Church Age, with the seven churches of the first century representing the spiritual conditions of the Church during the Church Age.

The latter part of verse 7, “To the one who **conquers** (*nikao*) I will grant to eat of the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God,” is often misunderstood to mean that only those who “conquer,” meaning to resist temptation and conquer evil, will be granted entrance into Heaven. This

supposedly implies that unless one “conquers,” he will have his “lampstand” removed and will be denied the right to eat from the tree of life in eternity. In other words, unless you hold fast to your faith during extreme adversity, you are not saved, or you will lose your salvation for that failure. Neither of these is what the passage is actually saying.

This is written to the church at Ephesus, not to any individual. It is the church as a whole that is guilty of this failure to “conquer” because it failed to hold fast to its faith. It is no longer a light to the world. God will turn off their light when they become a negative witness for Him.

There has been much speculation about the identity of the Nicolaitans, and the Scriptures do not specify who they were. However, we get a strong hint about what Jesus is referring to in the meaning of the name, “Nicolaitans.” In Scripture, a person's name or that of a place often carries significant meaning, and this is likely one of those cases. The word comes from *nikao*, meaning “to conquer,” and *laos*, meaning “people.” It is from *laos* that we get our word “laity.” The name means “conquer the people.” If the word is used symbolically in this passage—and I believe it is—it references the earliest attempts to force a priestly order or clergy onto the Church. This manmade system of priests replaces Christ as the Head of the Church, and the Ephesians despised this division between the brethren and Christ.

The Nicolaitans were apostate because they accepted error as truth, but it is the “works” that were despised. The word is *ergon* and refers to one’s labor or production, and it likely pertains to this false teaching.

**Revelation 2:7** “He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To the one who **conquers** (*nikao*), I will grant to eat of the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God.”

Interesting play on words here. Those who conquer the ones who conquer the people will eat from the tree of life in God's Paradise.

“Paradise” is *paradeisos* and usually refers to one of the compartments of Hades, of which there are three: Paradise, Torments, and the Abyss. You should remember from our study of the Underworld that Torments is separated from Paradise by the “Great Gulf Fixed,” technically a fourth part of Hades, unless it is included as part of the Abyss, which it may be.

Torments is the place where the wicked dead go at death, which we also call “Hell.” Paradise was where the righteous went at death, at least until sin was judged and the resurrection of Christ. Jesus told the repentant thief on the Cross he would be with him in Paradise, and the thief would have understood He was referring to the Paradise across the Great Gulf Fixed from Torments. Jesus speaks of this place in the story of Lazarus and the rich man (Luke 16:19-31). Paradise is empty now; its inhabitants have been taken to Heaven when the resurrected Christ ascended. Torments, however, is still occupied and will remain so until the Last Judgment.

“Conquers,” translated as “overcomes” in some translations, is a much-abused word. The legalists often use it to hammer grace into submission to works. The Greek word *nikao* is translated as “conquer” in the ESV, which I believe better reflects its meaning here than “overcomes.” The concept being presented refers to a victorious spiritual life, one lived by faith that leads to victory over or the *conquering of* sin (Galatians 5:16). The “overcomers” (conquerors) are not a spiritual elite, but rather believers whose active faith has granted them victory (1 John 5:4-5). “To the one who **conquers** (*nikao*), I will grant to eat of the tree of life (v.7). In other words, those in the Ephesian church who are successfully living their spiritual lives *are* taking sustenance from the Tree of Life.

Did you get that? They “*are* taking sustenance from the Tree of Life.”

What is the Tree of Life? Revelation 22:2 and the Genesis 3:22-24 passage suggest it is a literal tree that bears literal fruit. Then Proverbs 11:30 states, “The fruit of the righteous is a tree of life.” The Hebrew word translated “righteous” is *šaddîq*, meaning just, lawful, or righteous. The root word generally connotes conformity to an ethical or moral standard. Literally, it signifies being morally straight, which is considered the norm. When you consider Proverbs 11:30, its connection to obedience in Revelation, and its link to eternal life, I believe we can interpret this as the Tree of Life is meant to be a metaphor representing Jesus Christ and the righteous lifestyle He embodies and experienced by a believer “walking by means of the Spirit” (Galatians 5:16). If you are walking by the Spirit, you are experiencing the Fruit of the Spirit—living the very lifestyle Christ lived here on earth—and conquering sin. Consequently, you have access to (or eating from) the Tree of Life. I would extend the meaning of “life” to “eternal life,” referring to the Tree of Eternal Life found in Paradise, which

at this point is in Heaven. This depicts the proper and normal functioning of your eternal life. It is the highest manifestation of the love of Christ.

The fruit of John 15, the Fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5, and the Tree of Life in Revelation are all connected! They are different images of the same thing! If a believer is not obedient to the leading of the Spirit, not doing what he is called to do—whether in obeying God's commandments or fulfilling his spiritual calling—then he is not eating of the Tree of Life; he is not partaking of that spiritual “food.” And he needs to repent, just as Revelation 2:5 says, and return to his first love.

Plain and simple, you do not have to be in Heaven to eat from the Tree of Life. We do so whenever we obey God’s calling and walk by faith in the Spirit's leading and power. Such obedience, walking, fruitfulness, and fully living eternal life *are expressions of* loving God. The Ephesians are called to return to their “first love.” This call urges them to repent and return to their original walk. That repentance leads to a victorious, overcoming/ conquering lifestyle, which is the normal expectation for a believer. These victorious believers partake of the Tree of Life in *this* life. Every time you walk by means of the Spirit, are filled with the Spirit, and enjoy the fruit of the Spirit, with Christ formed in you, you are eating from the Tree of Life.

Jesus is not saying these believers will lose their salvation; He is urging the Ephesians to repent of their apostasy and return to their first love, and they will be victorious with genuine fruit production from their renewed love for Christ. “To him who overcomes I will give to eat from the tree of life, which is in the Paradise of God.”

## **Endurance**

“Endurance” is translated from the Greek word *hupomone*. It means patient, enduring, or steadfast. In the context of a Christian, it is used as the characteristic of someone who remains steadfast in their deliberate purpose and loyalty to faith, even in the face of the greatest trials and sufferings. As you can see, its meaning is very similar to *nikao*, overcome, but perhaps a stronger word with greater emphasis on the severity of the conditions being endured.

## Hebrews 10:35-39

**Hebrews 10:35** Therefore do not throw away your confidence, which has a great reward <sup>36</sup> For you have need of endurance, so that when you have done the will of God you may receive what is promised. <sup>37</sup> For, “Yet a little while, and the coming one will come and will not delay; <sup>38</sup> but my righteous one shall live by faith, and if he shrinks back, my soul has no pleasure in him.” <sup>39</sup> But we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who have faith and preserve their souls.

The author of Hebrews was writing to address a specific issue within a church mainly made up of Jewish believers, known as Messianic Jews. These are Jews who recognized Jesus as the promised Messiah and placed their full faith and trust in who He was and what He accomplished on the Cross. They were born-again believers.

However, this letter was written about 30 years after the Cross but before the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple in AD 70. The problem for this group of Jewish believers was that they expected Jesus to return soon and establish His Kingdom. Yet, here it is, 30 years later, and Jesus has not returned. As a result, they concluded they had been mistaken about Jesus, and He must not be the Messiah after all. Therefore, they needed to return to their faith as practiced under the Law of Moses, including offering sacrifices for sin. The presence of the Temple and a functioning priesthood was necessary for that; thus, we know this must have been before AD 70. The author of Hebrews was trying to convince them that they were wrong to think that way. More importantly, they could not go back and find the judicial righteousness they had previously gained under the Law through sacrifices, because those sacrifices were no longer valid. The Law was meant to convict sinners, and only through faith in what the sacrifices represented, the promised Messiah and His sacrificial death, could they find forgiveness. This was symbolized in the Feast of Yom Kippur, where the high priest made sacrifices and splashed blood on the Ark of the Covenant, symbolically cleansing the sins of the nation for one year, a ritual which had to be repeated annually. Of course, this points to the blood of Christ “washing away” sins. Since he had already come and had been judged for sin, the Law was no longer effective for the forgiveness of their sins. They could no longer find the judicial righteousness under the Law as they could before the Cross.

**Hebrews 6:4** For it is impossible, in the case of those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, and have shared in the Holy Spirit, <sup>5</sup> and have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the age to come, <sup>6</sup> and then have fallen away, to restore them again to repentance, since they are crucifying once again the Son of God to their own harm and holding him up to contempt.

It was impossible for these believers "who had been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, and have shared in the Holy Spirit" to return to the Law and seek forgiveness. Trying to do so would be an insult to Christ because they would be "crucifying once again the Son of God to their own harm and holding him up to contempt.'

The message was simply, "You can't go back, because 'back' isn't there anymore." The author encourages them to move forward toward spiritual maturity instead. What the readers needed was exactly what the writer had often said and implied – to persevere (endurance, v.36). These words express the central exhortation of the Book of Hebrews.

**Hebrews 10:38** but my righteous one shall live by faith, and if he shrinks back, my soul has no pleasure in him." <sup>39</sup> But we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who have faith and preserve their souls.

A person justified by faith should also live his spiritual life through faith—living it by the same faith that saved him, which is what the writer was urging his readers to do. But if he shrinks back, meaning if the "righteous one" commits apostasy and denounces his Christian profession, he cannot enjoy God's favor because he will be living in perpetual sin. This does NOT mean that the believer will lose his salvation. It does mean he has lost fellowship with the Lord and is outside his AO.

Then the author affirmed, "But we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed." Here, the original text has an emphatic "we," which the writer might have intended as an editorial "we." Then he would mean: "As far as I am concerned, I am determined not to shrink back and experience the ruin that divine retribution would bring." "Divine retribution" here does not refer to losing salvation but to divine discipline or chastisement, even to the sin leading to death.

The words “are destroyed” reflect the Greek *apōleia*, which can refer either to temporal or eternal ruin. In this context, we are looking at *temporal ruin*. This should not be misunderstood as referring to salvation. The phrase “preserve their souls” or “and are saved” in some translations somewhat freely translates *eis peripoiēsin psychēs*. However, “soul” here should be understood in the Hebraic sense as the person himself or his life, and in this context, it refers to how perseverance in faith protects an individual from the calamities that befall those who “shrink back.”

The term should be understood as protecting or saving one’s life. Although I believe the intention is more about “saving their spiritual lives,” Verse 38 suggests that interpretation: “but my righteous one shall *live* by faith.” “Live” is *zao* and relates to physical life, but it can also mean having true, active, blessed, and eternal life in the kingdom of God. This idea of “live by faith” refers to a spiritual life lived to the fullest.

To “shrink back” (translated as “draw back” in some cases) is a term that means to take in sail on a sailing vessel, which would slow down or even stop its progress. If the “righteous one” were to “reef his sails” due to discouragement, persecution, hardship, or depression he would become stranded. The author compares the believer to a sailor who should not stop or turn back, but should hoist all his sails and move forward boldly (Hebrews 6:1).

Trying to revert to the old system under the Law will result in a failed spiritual life that can only expect chastisement. The guidance and power of the Spirit will have been lost, and there will be no remedy for that in a system the Cross has rendered obsolete. The main message of this epistle is “Let us go on! You can’t go back, because ‘back’ isn’t there anymore.”

## **2 Timothy 2:10-13**

**2 Timothy 2:10** Therefore I endure everything for the sake of the elect, that they also may obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory. <sup>11</sup> The saying is trustworthy, for: If we have died with him, we will also live with him; <sup>12</sup> if we endure, we will also reign with him; if we deny him, he also will deny us; <sup>13</sup> if we are faithless, he remains faithful—for he cannot deny himself.

And here is another passage that seems to suggest a believer must earn his salvation or that he can lose it. Paul writes this from prison, as he

noted in verse 9, “I am suffering, bound with chains as a criminal.” He goes on to state that although he is imprisoned, “the word of God is not bound!”

Then, in verse 10, he states that he is willing to “endure everything” so that “the elect may obtain salvation that is in Christ Jesus.” Paul is prepared to suffer in his own body so that we might be saved. THAT is loving others to the fullest! God’s Word fulfills its purpose of calling out God’s people, the elect, so they, too, may receive the salvation that is in Christ Jesus, with eternal glory. If this process involves suffering from Paul, so be it. He was willing to endure (*hypomenō*, “be steadfast under”) everything for the sake of “the chosen ones” (*tous eklektous*; cf. Colossians 3:12; Titus 1:1).

Then in verse 12, he makes this statement, “If we endure, we will also reign with him; if we deny him, he also will deny us.” That sounds suspiciously like Paul is saying that a believer can lose his salvation if he fails to “endure” or denies Christ. But that interpretation contradicts everything else Paul says about salvation, like in Ephesians.

**Ephesians 2:8** For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, <sup>9</sup> not a result of works, so that no one may boast.

Or what he says in Romans.

**Romans 8:38** For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, <sup>39</sup> nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Or what he says in Galatians.

**Galatians 2:16** we know that a person is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ, so we also have believed in Christ Jesus, in order to be justified by faith in Christ and not by works of the law, because by works of the law no one will be justified.

Paul clearly understood and taught that salvation is by faith, entirely separate from any works by man, beyond just believing in what Christ did on the Cross. And as he states in the Romans passage, nothing can ever

separate us from Christ Jesus – nothing! That includes you. This is because He is faithful even when we are faithless. So, if our 2 Timothy 2:11 and 12 study passage doesn't teach that you can lose your salvation, then what does it teach?

The key is found in verse 11, "If we have died with him, we will also live with him." This conveys the powerful idea demonstrated in the rite of baptism and explained in Romans 6:2-23. The reference is not to martyrdom for Christ but to a believer's identification with the death and life of Christ.

**Romans 6:2** ... How can we who died to sin still live in it? <sup>3</sup> Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? <sup>4</sup> We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.

Baptism signifies the death of our old self and the birth into newness of life. "If we have died with him, we will also live with him." "Live" is *zao* and here means to live a new life in union with Christ, dedicated to God. It refers to a lifestyle that aligns with the themes of "abiding" or "walking" we have seen throughout this study. If we have died in Christ, we should be abiding in Christ. Our newly received eternal life should be functioning within our area of operations, as we walk in the Spirit and live the Christ life.

If we "endure, we will reign with Him." Walking in the Spirit in our AO consistently offers the potential for rewards. Living the life we are called to live in faith, following the leading of the Spirit, also means receiving rewards in eternity.

**2 Timothy 4:8** Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that day, and not only to me but also to all who have loved his appearing.

**Revelation 20:6** Blessed and holy is the one who shares in the first resurrection! Over such the second death has no power, but they will be priests of God and of Christ, and they will reign with him for a thousand years.

“Endure” is *hupomeno*, and here it means to persevere through misfortunes and trials while holding fast to one’s faith in Christ. Remember? The faith that saved you can also “save” (deliver) you through life’s trials and tribulations.

**2 Timothy 2:12** ... if we deny him, he also will deny us.

This does not suggest the possibility of being eternally rejected by God. “Deny” here is *arneomai* and means to reject or refuse, not to accept, and refers to refusing something offered. The “something offered” being rejected includes all the benefits of a vibrant spiritual walk, as opposed to choosing a carnal life that is separate from the leading and enabling of the Spirit. You have a choice: you can walk (*peripateo*) in the Spirit or deny (*arneomai*) the benefits of that walk. It's your choice.

**2 Timothy 2:13** if we are faithless, he remains faithful—for he cannot deny himself.

This passage simply encourages believers to exercise the faith that saved them and use it to live the life they are called to live in Christ. If we “endure,” we will reign with Him forever. And even “if we are faithless, he remains faithful—for he cannot deny himself” (v.13). Yes, even if we completely mess up our lives, we will still be with Him in eternity because He lives in us—we have His perfect righteousness and access to the same power that enabled Him in His humanity to be victorious, whether we take advantage of that fact or not. And if we do, we have the Fruit of the Spirit formed in us.

## **Matthew 10:22 and 24:13**

**Matthew 10:22** and you will be hated by all for my name’s sake. But the one who endures to the end will be saved.

**Matthew 24:13** But the one who endures to the end will be saved

These two passages are nearly identical. We see that word *hupomone* again translated as “endures.” Both passages conclude with the statement about those who “endure to the end will be saved.” This does not mean that unless you endure in faith all the way to the end, you will lose your

salvation. I believe we have firmly established that there is NOTHING you can do to forfeit your salvation. Once saved, always saved. However, you might get so far outside your AO and into carnality that you become a poor witness for God's Kingdom. In that case, you can expect increasing discipline meant to lead you to repentance, recognize your dangerous state, and return to your proper place as a child of God. Ignoring these warnings could ultimately lead to suffering the sin unto death, as God removes you as a poor witness for Him.

If you recall, in a Christian context, the word "saved" (sozo) is used in three different tenses.

- **Past tense** – *was saved* from the fires of Hell and eternal damnation
- **Present tense** – *Is being* saved in our daily walk in the Spirit through the trials and tribulations of life.
- **Future tense** – *will be* saved, meaning ultimate sanctification and glorification, then residing in the presence of God for eternity.

Have you guessed which "saved" is being used in these two Matthew passages? If you guessed the present tense, you win a stuffed goat. Very simply, these two passages are saying that if you endure using the same faith that saved you (past tense), that same faith *will* "save" (deliver) you through life's trials and tribulations (present tense). Stay in your AO (endure in faith), and you will be "saved" (delivered) through whatever issue you're facing. The faith that *saved* is the faith that *saves*.

## Colossians 1:21-23

**Colossians 1:21** And you, who once were alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, <sup>22</sup> he has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death, in order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before him, <sup>23</sup> if indeed you continue in the faith, stable and steadfast, not shifting from the hope of the gospel that you heard, which has been proclaimed in all creation under heaven, and of which I, Paul, became a minister.

Verse 21 and 22 establishes the fact that the Colossians were once lost but are now reconciled. Jesus reconciled them "in his body of flesh by his death." Spirits cannot die, and "without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness" (Hebrews 9:22). To redeem humans, Christ Himself must be truly human (1 Timothy 2:5; Hebrews 2:17). Therefore, Christ's physical

body and death were essential for human salvation (Romans 7:4; Hebrews 10:10).

The result of Christ's death is redemptive, "to present you holy in His sight." This may mean judicially perfect as to a believer's *position*, or spiritually perfect as to his *condition*. Ultimately, God envisions both for believers, and Christ's death is the basis for judicial (past tense) justification (Romans 3:21–26), experiential (present tense) sanctification (Romans 6–7), and even ultimate (future tense) glorification (Romans 8). The focus here is on the present-tense sanctification. They will be "holy and blameless and above reproach" (v.22) if they "indeed ... continue in the faith."

The statement, "If indeed you continue in the faith, stable and steadfast, not shifting from the hope of the gospel that you heard," is our focus. It is a first-class conditional clause in Greek, meaning it is a true statement and declares that Paul does not doubt they will remain in the faith.

If (and they will) continue in the faith—using the same faith that saved them when they "once were alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds" (v.21)—then they will be seen as "holy and blameless and above reproach before him."

This passage does not imply that "continuing in the faith" is a requirement for entering Heaven. Instead, it states that there is indeed a condition for being considered "blameless and above reproach" in our spiritual lives and daily walk. That walk must be rooted in faith—the same faith that saves us is the same faith that will keep us blameless and above reproach in His sight. "Above reproach" (v.22) means to be free from accusation (*anenkletous*). This calls for a walk of faith: "to continue in the faith, stable and steadfast, not shifting from the hope of the gospel that you heard."

## Conclusion

**Romans 5:1** Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. <sup>2</sup> Through him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God. <sup>3</sup> Not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, <sup>4</sup> and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, <sup>5</sup> and

hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.

In the first two verses, we have all three tenses of saved.

- Past Tense — <sup>1</sup> Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.
- Present Tense — <sup>2</sup> Through him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand,
- Future Tense — and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God.

As you can see, it's very easy to jump to wrong conclusions when interpreting Scripture. Often, the key to understanding a passage is simply understanding the context. This can include historical context, spiritual context, or the thematic context of the passage. On that last point, much confusion can be easily cleared up by recognizing which version of "saved" is being discussed.