

Marks of An Overcomer

Acts 19:17-20

By Phillip G. Kayser at DCC on 9-28-2008

Introduction

The last time I was in Acts 19, we looked at spiritual warfare in verses 11-20. But several of you asked me if I would dig a little deeper into verses 17-20. I think a couple of you were especially interested in the book burning that was going on. I'll look at that. But I wanted to especially look at seven marks of an overcomer, and then six indicators that you may be heading into a relapse into sin. And you might wonder where the relapse comes in. It actually happens about ten years later when the book of Revelation addresses problems that crept into this church of Ephesus. They had let their guard down in key areas of their lives, and Satan was taking advantage of them once again. And that can happen to any of us. I think there is a lot that can be learned by comparing the church of Ephesus in this chapter with what happened ten years later in Revelation 2.

All across America today there are heartbroken Christians who have known in the past what it means to be overcomers; who have experienced beautiful fellowship with God, and yet who have fallen on the rocks of self-destruction through addictions, pornography, and other forms of selfishness. And it's not just lay people who have fallen. Pastors are in the news as having fallen into terrible sins. I know of a pastor whose ministry (and eventually his whole life) was destroyed by drugs. And he committed suicide. I know of another minister who would never have thought that he could fall into adultery, and yet fell. I know of another minister who had to step down from the ministry after it was discovered that he had been skimming funds from the church bank account for years. How many Christians have testified that they started with a small compromise, which led to other compromises and eventually they found themselves totally ensnared to the devil. Pornography is a plague on our nation, isn't it? It is also a plague in the church. Many have said, "I can't help it." They are no longer overcomers. World Magazine did an article on *Protestant* pastors who have compromised sexually, and it often started with pornography. And we aren't always talking about sleezeball hypocrites. We are sometimes

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talking about Christians who are mature and who long to be right with God, but find themselves losers.

Yet over and over the book of Revelation God gives hope to us that we can be overcomers. And that book gives marvelous motivation to convince us that it is worthwhile to be overcomers. In fact, I want you to follow along and look at some of the promises that are given in the book of Revelation if we are willing to be overcomers. Look first of all at Revelation chapter 2. It's the last book of the Bible. The second chapter. Chapters 2-3 address issues in seven different churches in the first century. And Christ writes these letters to encourage and to admonish.

Revelation 2:7 says to the church in Ephesus (that's the church that we have been looking at in Acts 19). **“He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes I will give to eat from the tree of life, which is in the midst of the Paradise of God.”** Adam and Eve had been banished from this kind of fellowship, but He is promising overcomers that they will not be banished from God's presence. Look at the second phrase in verse 11.

Revelation 2:11 **“...He who overcomes shall not be hurt by the second death.”** That's giving us a hint that all believers must eventually be overcomers. Don't see that as discouraging. See it as your destiny that God's grace makes possible. Look at the second sentence in verse 17:

Revelation 2:17 **“To him who overcomes I will give some of the hidden manna to eat. And I will give him a white stone, and on the stone a new name written which no one knows except him who receives it.”** It is marvelous imagery here. In the Old Testament there was manna that was hidden inside the mercy seat in the Holy of Holies, where no one but the High Priest could come, and He could only come once a year. *But, not even the High Priest* could eat of that hidden manna in the Old Testament. In fact, he wasn't even allowed to peek inside the Ark of the Covenant. But that has all changed. Christ says that when we become overcomers, God will usher us into such close intimacy with Himself that we will be closer to Him than the High Priest was in the Old Testament. We will have the intimacy of being invited to his dinners with the white invitation stone. He is saying, "It is worth it to be an overcomer." And I want you to be convinced that it is worthy the fight. Look at verse 26.

Revelation 2:26 **“And he who overcomes, and keeps My works until the end, to him I will give power over the nations — He shall rule them with a rod of iron; they shall be dashed to pieces like the potter's vessels' - as**

I also have received from My Father... That's incredible. The same authority that Jesus has received from the Father to rule the nations with a rod of iron will be given to any believer who overcomes. You can have that right now. If churches were to once again be filled with overcomers, think of the difference it would make among the nations! He wants us to be motivated to be overcomers. Look at chapter 3, verse 5.

Revelation 3:5 “He who overcomes shall be clothed in white garments, and I will not blot out his name from the Book of Life; but I will confess his name before My Father and before His angels. Jesus won't be ashamed of you. Look at verse 12.

Revelation 3:12 “He who overcomes, I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God, and he shall go out no more. And I will write on him the name of My God and the name of the city of My God, the New Jerusalem, which comes down out of heaven from My God. And I will write on him My new name. Are you beginning to get the impression that He is expecting all Christians to eventually be overcomers, and not just a select few? Well, it's true. There is no need for any of us to remain in bondage to porn, drugs, eating disorders or other enslaving habits. You can be overcomers. Look at chapter 3, verse 21.

Revelation 3:21 “To him who overcomes I will grant to sit with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne. He is promising enormous authority in your life; authority even over demons. Do you know why the sons of Sceva were overcome by the demons in the chapter we read from Acts? It's because in the book of Acts there is no neutrality. You are either overcomers, or you are overcome by something. Turn to Acts 19, and let's look at this contrast between the prevailing of Satan over the son's of Sceva and the prevailing of Paul and believers over the demonic.

In Acts 19:20 it says, **So the word of the Lord grew mightily and prevailed.** This is a book where no neutrality is known. Either the *Word of God* prevails in our life or *Satan* prevails in our life. Look at verse 16 where we see a complete contrast. Acts 19:16: **Then the man in whom the evil spirit was leaped on them, overpowered them, and prevailed against them, so that they fled out of that house naked and wounded.** Same Greek word is used. The sons of Sceva used Jesus name but did not have His power, so Satan prevailed. The believers of verses 17-20 not only have the name of Jesus, but the power of Jesus was present, and the Word

prevailed. What made them prevail here? What do they lack ten years later in Revelation 2? We are going to be looking at the contrasts.

Throughout this book we see this contrast in both the lives of believers and unbelievers. Peter tells Ananias and Sapphira that Satan had filled their heart and captured them. They had failed to be overcomers. In Acts 8 Peter tells Simon, **I see that you are poisoned by bitterness and bound by iniquity.** Here was a professing believer who was in bondage to sin. "...you are poisoned by bitterness and bound by iniquity." 2 Peter 2:19 speaks of pastors who **while they promise them liberty, are themselves slaves of corruption** [an interesting phrase, in light of today's controversies over grace], **for by whom a person is overcome, by him also he is brought into bondage.** There are even upright, respectable Christians who could easily be described by the next verse, which talks about those who have escaped from the pollutions of the world becoming entangled in them again. They have had a relapse. So what are the marks of relapse and what are the marks of an overcomer?

I. Marks of An Overcomer (Acts 19:17-20)

A. You stand in awe and fear of God; God is big and men are small (v. 17)

Let's start at verse 17 to look at some of the marks of an overcomer. Acts 19:17. After the demonic had overpowered these Jews, and people could see that the Jews lacked the power that Paul had, verse 17 says, **This became known both to all Jews and Greeks dwelling in Ephesus; and fear fell on them all, and the name of the Lord Jesus was magnified.** And because believers also came to fear God, and knew that God was more powerful than Satan, it says in verse 18 **And many who had believed came confessing and telling their deeds.** That would take some courage to confess your sins to everyone. But those who fear God in verse 17 do not fear man in verse 18. The two are polar opposites of each other.

I think the fear of God is one of the most fundamental marks of an overcomer. It is popular nowadays to emphasize love for God so much that fear is almost totally neglected. And actually, it is often thought that the two are incompatible. Scripture says that perfect love casts out fear. But that's a different word for fear, as Rodney pointed out a couple weeks ago. It's dread that is incompatible with love. Reverence is not.

But others object: how can we come boldly to the throne of grace if we must also fear God? Doesn't Hebrews 4:16 tell us, **Let us therefore come boldly**

to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need”? Yes it does. But the same chapter commands us, **Let us fear...** (v. 1), and warns believers that they need to seek mercy. It commands us to come boldly, and it also commands us to fear. So obviously you can come boldly and still fear the one that you are coming to. It tells us that the only way we can approach God is if we are 'fessed up and dressed in Christ's righteousness. But over and over again Hebrews warns us that the boldness with which we come to God needs to be accompanied with reverence and godly fear, for (says Hebrews) **our God is a consuming fire.**

Some of you older folks have heard this illustration from me before, but indulge me and let me tell it again. I'm not as creative as Rodney in coming up with new illustrations all the time. Out in Ethiopia my dad and I had between 17 and 20 beehives, and all but one of them were African style beehives. They were a six foot long woven bamboo cylinder covered in waterproofed leaves. You'll never guess what the Ethiopians waterproofed them with - It was cow dung. It worked great. When you smeared that stuff on the bamboo basket it made a swell hive. And then you'd smoke it out with special herbs to make it an attractive smell for the bees. But anyway, these were not the tame Italian honeybees we have here in America. They were African blacks with a very aggressive nature. And one of my hives had the notorious African killer bees. These bees would with little or no provocation swarm all over an animal or a person, sometimes covering an animal or a person so thickly you couldn't see the person's skin. And those bees were killers. One time that beehive chased every person and animal off our station and it took us hours to get the animals back. And my parents were kind of upset with me. My dad killed the bees that night with a sulfur stick. I can't imagine why. But even in the night they came out to attack us. And I have some fun stories of adventures that I had with those bees. I don't know how many times bees have stung me. One time I forgot to tie off my pant legs and the bees swarmed up my legs stinging as they went. When I took off my pants at home, they were thickly covered with stingers. I don't know how many hundred stingers I counted. So, I had a healthy respect for these bees. But I loved them. And when I had my hat and screen and my clothes, I enjoyed working with them. I came boldly to them. I was in absolutely no danger from them. But if I tried to approach them without my bee suit, it was all over. I mean, I was scared to death of these bees when I didn't have my bee suit on. I sometimes felt an adrenaline rush even when I was fully suited up because you couldn't even see through the netting, and you could smell the bee venom as they tried to sting through the clothes.

But boy did they produce the honey. They were wonderful. And with the exception of the killer bees, if you didn't mess with them, they didn't mess with you. And even if you did mess with them, you didn't need to fear anything if you were clothed rightly.

And even though that is not a perfect illustration, that is sort of how it is with God. He loves us, and we love Him. He has permitted us to come boldly into His presence when we are clothed in the righteous clothes of Christ. In the last sermon, I looked at Zechariah 3 and showed how Joshua the high priest had clothed himself with Christ every day in order to have power against Satan. But if we don't suit up in Christ, watch out. The times that Scripture mentions people coming face to face with God, they always fall on their faces in fear. Daniel was so weak that he couldn't stand up - and that was just an angel that he saw. To treat God as one of the boys that we slap on the back, or one of the girls is not wise. To rebel against Him is even more foolish.

To use another analogy. Children can cuddle in their father's lap and experience fellowship when they are in right relationship with dad. But when they rebel against dad, and he brings out the paddle, there is fear and trembling. And even when they are not in trouble, they would fear crossing him. But that reverence does not translate into lack of love. When rightly related they are all over dad and have fun with dad. A lot more fun than I had with my bees. The love and the boldness of approach are in context of a healthy fear. And that is exactly how the book of Hebrews ties boldness and fear together. Let me read you three of the eight passages where Hebrews commands us to fear God.

He tells believers in Hebrews 10: **The Lord will judge His people.** [So we are not talking about pagans. We are talking about believers; people who can come boldly to God and ask for mercy. And it says, "The Lord will judge His people."] **It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.** Fearful for whom? Fearful for his people when they are rebellious. Our God is so holy that you don't mess around with Him. This is one of the marks of an overcomer. You ought to be concerned if you have no fear of God. Proverbs says that it is by the fear of the Lord that we can depart from evil.

Hebrews 11 speaks of Noah moved with godly fear. It moved Him; it motivated Him. Fear of God is a tremendous motivator for holiness, just as fear of the paddle keeps kids from crossing mom or dad.

Hebrews 12:28 **Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us have grace, by which we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear.** He indicates that *grace* enables us to have this fear. That is utterly different than the conception that some people have of grace where you can sin with indifference. And he indicates that we need to fear since there is an acceptable and an unacceptable way of serving Him. But he doesn't end there. Let me read the whole section: **Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us have grace, by which we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear. For our God is a consuming fire.**

One of the books that I have recommended to a number of you is the book, *When People are Big and God is Small* by Ed Welch. This book shows how the fear of the Lord is at the heart of Christianity, and how the fear of God is a remedy for every other form of fear, lack of esteem, lack of confidence, pride, etc. The God of most Christians is far too small, and consequently we fear man because men are big in our sight. We feel like we have to perform for them, look good in their eyes. When people are bigger than God in our eyes we tend to feel very little shame before God and much shame before others. It's a marvelous book.

But the Scripture not only says that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom (Prov. 9:10), but the Scriptures also link the fear of God with victory over enemies (1 Sam. 11:7; 2 Chron. 14:14; 17:10). It links the fear of God with loyalty of heart (2 Chron 19:9), hatred for evil (Prov. 8:13), tremendous confidence (Prov. 14:26). That passage says, **In the fear of the LORD there is strong confidence...** Why would it give you confidence? Because God is so big in your eyes, that HE can handle any problem that life might throw at you. That's why the next phrase says, **His children will have a place of refuge.** "In the fear of the LORD there is strong confidence and His children will have a place of refuge" The Scripture links the fear of the Lord with satisfaction in life (Prov. 19:23), riches, honor and life (Prov. 22:4) and many other things that the human heart longs for.

Acts 19:17 says, **fear fell on them all...** If we do not have the fear of the Lord, we are setting ourselves up for a fall into sins we never dreamed of falling into because Scripture says, **by the fear of the LORD one departs from evil.** (Prov. 16:6). You can't even depart from evil if you don't have fear. The fear of the Lord will keep your eyes from wandering where they ought not, because it is focused on what God sees, not just what other people see. The fear of the Lord will keep us pure on the Internet because it focuses

on pleasing God and it fears displeasing Him. Even if you know that you can't be caught, the fear of the Lord will keep you from cheating. The fear of the Lord is an essential ingredient in being an overcomer. If you are having trouble with temptations, I would highly recommend that you check out the tape series on the fear of the Lord by Al Martin.

Do you have the fear of the Lord? Do you tremble at the thought of crossing Him? It is one of the marks of an overcomer, and without it you could relapse into sin like Ephesus did, or you could fall into new sins that surprise even you. Psalm 96:9 says, “**Tremble before Him all the earth.**”

B. Your motivation is to please God (v. 17)

The second thing that we see in verse 17, and it actually flows out of fear, is that your motivation is to please God. It says not only, **and fear fell on them all**, but it also says, **and the name of the Lord Jesus was magnified**. They wanted to do things because it would glorify Jesus; because it would please Him. It's not that often that people come to me for counseling from outside the church with this motivation – “Pastor, I need your help to learn how to please God. It grieves me that I have displeased him so many times.” No, that's not usually the motivation. More often, I hear people tell me, “Pastor, I'm about to lose my marriage. You've got to help.” “Or pastor, I feel so miserable. You've got to help me feel better.” Or even worse, “Pastor, you've got to change my wife. She drives me crazy.” Those are all self-serving and man-centered reasons that will not carry you through the tough times. Our goal for being overcomers must be to please the Lord, or all of our work will be for nothing.

Nor is it enough to work on your sanctification to please a spouse or to get someone off your back. We call that social holiness. It's not measured against God; it's measured against man. As soon as you rise to a level where other people think that you are pretty good, you quit growing. Man-centered motivations are not enough. They do not guarantee victory over a relapse. Usually, the change of behavior only goes as far as is needed to please that other person, and then change stops. In contrast, an overcomer is never satisfied with his life. Because his or her goal is to please Jesus and glorify Him, he will always be pressing onward for the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. Social holiness seems too shallow for him because he knows how much more God wants. Sometimes a person is motivated to do good because he is a leader (perhaps a father or an elder or a pastor and) and he would be too ashamed if others found out, so he is prevented from sinning. That is OK as far as it goes, but it doesn't deal with the heart root of sin.

Others simply stop from sinning because of fear of getting caught by the police. They may have changed their outward behavior, but their lawless hearts have not changed.

And so this can be a second mark you can evaluate your life on. Do you do the right thing only because of your spouse, or the police, or some other person? If that is the only reason, you may stop doing it if your spouse becomes weak. Your desire should be to please God even if everyone else is displeased. Your motivation should not be simply pain relief or comfort, but it should be God's glory.

C. You have no interest in maintaining façades (v. 18)

A third mark of an overcomer is sincerity instead of the presence of façades. You see these movies on the old west where buildings would have a second story front wall, but nothing behind it to make it look like it was a two-story building when it was really only a one-story building. That's a façade. There are even fake windows and sometimes fake curtains up there. Stores and banks sometimes did that to make the building look bigger than it was. That is a façade. A façade in a person is a false appearance that makes us look better or bigger or brighter or more in control than we really are. If we are men pleasers, we are going to tend to put on facades of what we think *they* want to see. We will probably not dare to let others know what our true failings, or fears, or sins might be because people might realize that we are not as good as we are trying to pretend to be.

This is especially true of Christians who are on drugs or who watch pornography. Because it is such a socially stigmatized sin, people who have fallen into the sin are too ashamed to admit their addiction. Why? Because of the previous point – their focus is not on God, and their holiness is a social holiness. They have to maintain a façade or they will be devastated. But the overcomer is more interested in pleasing God and overcoming the addiction than in maintaining a façade.

What is true of addictions is also true in other area of our lives. You set yourself up for deeper and greater falls if you do not confess your sins and seek accountable relationships. Verse 18 says, **And many who had believed came confessing and telling their deeds.** Ohhhhh!! That's so humbling. It goes against pride. "You mean I need to tell people the awful deeds that I did? That would be too humiliating!" But that is precisely the point. We want to crucify our pride, and crucifixion is not pleasant. But it's one of the marks of an overcomer. In fact, I should have put that in your outlines as an extra point – willing to crucify your pride. Scripture says,

Pride goes before destruction and a haughty spirit before a fall (Prov. 6:8). It leaves us vulnerable to Satan's attacks, and it removes the possibility of God's defense. God will not defend a proud person from a fall. James says, **God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble.** Transparency and a willingness to seek help, and to admit wrong, and repent of our sins ironically is what makes us stronger. Facades set us up for relapse; vulnerability is a mark of an overcomer. Don't think you have arrived. Don't pretend that you are perfect. If there is sin, let's confess it and tell our accountability partners that we are determined to put the sin behind us.

D. You burn your bridges to sin (v. 19)

The fourth mark of an overcomer is that he is willing to burn his bridges. And they did that in this chapter when they burned their books. In the movie *Fireproof*, Caleb metaphorically burned his bridges to porn when he got rid of his computer. The expression of burning your bridges comes from an ancient military tactic to motivate the troops. The commander would lead his army over a bridge into enemy territory and then order the bridge burned behind them. This meant that the soldiers had no way of escape. Fleeing from the enemy was not an option. The only options were win or die. These soldiers had nothing to lose by fighting boldly and daringly.

Apparently that is what Cortez did when he came to the Americas. He burned his ships so that the soldiers knew they had to go forward. There was no going backward.

In economics and in other areas we often hear the expression, never burn your bridges behind you. And in most cases that's wise. You leave yourself a way out. You hedge your investments by minimizing risks. But when it comes to fighting against sin, we *must* burn our bridges. It shows whether you are serious about fighting sin or whether you plan to go back to your sins the moment things get to uncomfortable. Too many people convince themselves that they really want to quit their problem, but they don't get rid of the temptations, which means they really don't want to get rid of the problem. They are just fooling themselves. Here the temptations would be to go back to the magic incantations of the past. And in verse 19 it says, **Also, many of those who had practiced magic brought their books together and burned them in the sight of all.** They not only made it impossible to go back to these books, but they made a public proclamation to make it harder for them to return.

Today the occult has come back into the church through New Age medicine, certain kinds of body piercings and body modifications, clothing and music. Modern rock and country music is often filled with occultic messages that promote drugs, illicit sex, the demonic and bad attitudes. And these in turn give legal ground for Satan to be able to harass you. But because the music is so attractive, the Christians drink deeply of it. And this passage shows the remarkable break that the church made with every facet of the occult. If this event in Acts 19 had occurred today, it would probably not only be book and magazine burning, but also CD and tape burning, video burning and internet pornography burning. There are different ways of burning bridges, but they mean that we are unwilling to give ourselves an easy way out. We are planning to fight sin with all our might. We are putting up hedges.

Way back, I used the illustration of the cartoon strip Cathy. Forgive me for repeating that one too. But Cathy and her friend are sitting together with Cathy eating a donut. The first caption says, “Yum, yum, yum!” She is the picture of bliss. The next caption shows her crying and saying, “Why? Why? Why? Twenty-four hours of willpower done in by one doughnut. Unbelievable. I keep thinking I’ll change and then I do the exact same thing. Every day, the exact same rut. I get up, give myself the big motivational speech, feel self-righteous for two hours...eat a doughnut. Why do I even bother with the preamble?? Why not just get up, eat the doughnut and be done with it?? Why not just leave a box of doughnuts next to the bed so I won’t have to waste time getting up and pretending I’m not going to have one?? Why not just go to sleep with a doughnut in my mouth so I don’t even have to bother waking up before I start chewing???” And her friend asks her: “Why not just keep doughnuts out of your house, Cathy?” Cathy’s response: “What? And let them think they’re winning?” She was unwilling to burn her bridges. She wanted to be close to her temptation while pretending she was fighting her temptation.

I have counseled people who have committed adultery, and one of the requirements that I make is to burn the bridges. One person was unwilling to give the name of the person with whom she had committed adultery. She wasn’t being serious in her repentance. Another was unwilling to give up the apartment key. Another was unwilling for me to meet with them and the spouses that they had been wronged, so that all five of us could talk about how to prevent this from happening again. I don’t do this because I enjoy it or like embarrassing people. The times I have done that have been very uncomfortable for me as well. But they have put a huge obstacle in the way of sin. However, many people are scared to burn their bridges. With that

lack of seriousness, it is clear that there will be a relapse. We must burn our bridges behind us when fighting sin.

No matter what the sin may be - viewing pornography, stealing, or whatever, burn your bridges. It's the one area of life where it makes sense and is worth it. It makes you psychologically prepared to fight to the death because you have left yourself no way of backing out.

E. You are willing to make sacrifices to be right (v. 19)

The fifth mark of an overcomer is a willingness to make sacrifices in order to do the right thing. This was an enormous economic sacrifice. It says, **And they counted up the value of them, and it totaled fifty thousand pieces of silver.** We saw last time that this is a lot of money. One of those silver coins was worth a day's wages. To translate to modern times, think of even a wage of \$8/an hour being average. It's actually more than that now, but let's stick to \$8. That would mean that they were burning up 3.2 million dollars worth of wages. That's a pretty expensive bonfire. I can imagine people thinking, "Well, at least sell it and use the money for the Lord." But they didn't want others to stumble from this trash and they gave it as a sacrifice to the Lord. There was no rationalizing. They counted the cost.

There are other sacrifices that God calls for - some times it is simply working hard on our problems. Other times it is sacrificing our sleep, or the difficulty of resisting sexual temptation, or the sacrifice of the world's shame and scorn. Sometimes it may be the cost of burning books, CDs and videotapes. But for the overcomer, it is all worthwhile. He is committed no matter what the cost to reputation, to finances, to time, to effort to sleep or whatever. In the movie we saw yesterday (Fireproof), Caleb made a lot of sacrifices. But some people worship self-gratification. They will not destroy the idol of comfort. The believers in Hebrews were complaining that fighting sin was so hard. And the writer responded, **"You have not yet resisted to bloodshed, striving against sin"** (Heb. 12:4). He was basically saying, "Where are your wounds? Have you really been fighting? What sacrifices have you made? I don't believe you have been fighting seriously because I don't see any metaphorical blood on your clothing. You've given up without a fight. You aren't a soldier of the cross."

Evaluate yourself. Do you have this mark of an overcomer? If not, ask God for it and by God's grace strive for it, because without it you lack something that could prevent a relapse into sin or that could prevent an even greater sin

than you have already been involved in. One man told me that he knew pornography was his weakness and he travelled a lot and was most tempted in the motels. He burned his bridges by calling ahead and asking management to remove the TV, or to cut off service before he got there. He told an accountability partner to ask him the next day what he had done. If the TV was not removed, that was the first thing he did, was to unplug it. That's burning your bridges. Maybe not all the way, but it is definitely making it more difficult to back out of your commitment.

F. Constantly adding Bible verses and allowing the Scripture to conquer you ("grew mightily and prevailed") (v. 20)

The fifth and sixth marks require being in the Scriptures. Verse 20 says not only that the Scripture grew in their lives, but also that it conquered them: **So the word of the Lord grew mightily and prevailed.** What does that mean that the word grew? We are obviously not adding pages to the Bible. So it's not growing by adding the Word to the Bible, but adding the Bible to our lives. Psalm 119 says, **"Thy word have I hid in my heart, that I might sin against you."** That's causing the Word to grow in us. If you are not memorizing Scripture, the Word of God is not growing in you. If you do not meditate on God's Word, it is not growing. In verse 20 it is obvious that the Word took up a larger and larger part of people's lives. People were saturated in the word. On the other hand, a lessening of an appetite for the Word of God is a danger signal. Peter admonishes us. **Therefore, laying aside all malice, all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and all evil speaking, as newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby, if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is good.** If you are a newborn babe, God will grant you a hunger for the Word. It is a sign of sickness when a baby does not drink. And it is a sign of danger and sickness when a Christian does not get into the Word.

G. Scripture finds soil to grow in your life (v. 20)

And lastly, Scripture finds good soil to grow in within your life. God's word grew and prevailed in their lives because it was not just heard, it was responded to. Do you pray that God would plough the soil of your heart? Do you pray that He would have His way in your life? Do you daily pray for the filling of the Holy Spirit? Do you evaluate any rocks in the soil and cast them out? Those are the kinds of ways that you can make sure that the soil of your life is ready for the growth of God's Word.

So those are the marks of an overcomer: the fear of the Lord, a motivation to please God, getting rid of a façade Christianity that is simply seeking to please people, burning your bridges, willing to sacrifice, memorizing and meditating upon the Word of God, and making the soil of your heart conducive to growth.

II. Marks Of Relapse (Revelation 2:1-7)

A. *Notice that relapse into sin can occur...*

1. **Even when Christ's presence is in the church (v. 1-2)**
2. **Those who are Christians (vv. 1-2)**
3. **Those who are godly (v. 2)**
4. **Those who have a good reputation for orthodoxy (v. 2)**
5. **Those who are disciplined (vv. 2-3)**
6. **Those who minister to others (v. 3)**
7. **Those with endurance (v. 3)**
8. **Hatred for certain grosser sins (v. 6)**
9. **Therefore, even the mature should be on guard about danger if the following are present in their lives:**

But let's quickly go to Revelation 2 and see how many in Ephesus lost some of these marks and began to get into the danger zone. This was written about ten years later. It's about the time that we've existed as a church. And what John says is that they did much good, but verse 4 says they had lost their first love and verse 5 says, **Remember therefore from where you have fallen...** They had fallen from their former radical Christianity. They still had many areas right, but there was enough gone that in verse 7 Jesus urges them to be overcomers and implies that not all of them were.

In one sense, the reverse of every point we have looked at is a mark of relapse. So I haven't really divided these up accurately. But just think of the points under Roman numeral II as additional marks of relapse.

But under point A, I just want you to notice that these guys weren't sleaze balls. These were good Christians who were experiencing Christ walking in

their midst. They had a good reputation. They were disciplined. They ministered to others. They had endurance. They hated some of the grosser sins. And the point is that even mature Christians should be on guard about danger if these marks of relapse are present. Don't shake your head at pastors who have fallen into sin and wonder how anyone could do that. There but for God's grace, any of us could go.

B. Loss of "first love" for God (v. 4)

The first mark is a loss of that deep "first-love" for God and for each other. Verse 4 says, **Nevertheless I have this against you, that you have left your first love.** Those of you who went with us to watch Fireproof yesterday know how this can happen in a marriage. It was only as he started doing the "first works" that God started renewing the "first love." But losing our first love for God is far more dangerous than anything you saw in the movie. It is one of the biggest indicators that you are on the road to relapse. Of course, if you grieve over this loss of first love, you have hope. It is an indicator of grace at work within you. But if point C is true of you, you are even further down the slippery slope.

C. Indifference to the loss of close relationship with God (v. 5a)

Point C speaks of indifference to the loss of close relationship with God. Verse 5 says, **Remember therefore from where you have fallen,** implying that they weren't even thinking about the changes that had taken place. It's one thing to have lost a sense of God's closeness and to be grieved about it and to hunger and thirst after God as David did, but it is quite another to not even be thinking about it. The early character of Ephesus was phenomenal. And the changes came so slowly that they didn't even notice the change. So indifference is a danger signal.

D. Losing our awareness of sin or of the need to repent (v. 5)

Another mark of relapse is losing an awareness of sin or of the need to repent. Perhaps at one time you were sensitive over and very grieved by sins that no longer trouble you. In the movie Fireproof, Caleb couldn't seem to see his sins. Like these Ephesians, he focused on the good things that he did, and couldn't recognize the selfishness of his heart or the hurt that he was bringing. It was always someone else's fault. When you lose that sense of repentance over sin, it is a danger signal that you might be ready for Satan to pounce a bigger sin on you.

E. Slackening Zeal In The “First Works” (v. 5)

And then finally, a slackening zeal in the first works. Verse 5 says, **repent and do the first works, or else I will come to you quickly and remove your lampstand from its place - unless you repent.** The first works is using the same analogy as first love. It is the love that a newlywed has for each other, and the first works are the good deeds that a newlywed does for each other. They spend time together, enjoy each other's company, serve each other in various ways, and seek to please each other. It is the “Love Dare” of the movie, Fireproof. And God says that we need to work at our marriage to Christ. We need to spend time with Him, serve Him in various ways, seek to please Him and basically devote ourselves to Him. It is first works that keeps first love alive, and it is first love that keeps us sensitive to breaks in relationship.

Conclusion

Some of you may have wished that I had dug deeper on the intriguing issues of demonism and spiritual warfare with Satan. But our warfare with our flesh is probably the most important way that we can be on guard against Satan.

I don't know what the besetting sins of all of you are, but I do know that Jude promises that God can keep you from stumbling into any of them again. It says, **Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy...** God can cause you to conquer your sins and to make you overcomers. It is a goal worth pursuing. And these 12 character traits are character traits that will help you to keep from relapsing into sin. Make it your goal in life to live them out. And may He receive all the glory. Amen.

Marks of An Overcomer

Acts 19:17-20

By Phillip G. Kayser at DCC on 9-28-2008

Introduction

- I. Marks of An Overcomer (Acts 19:17-20)
 - A. You stand in awe and fear of God; God is big and men are small (v. 17)
 - B. Your motivation is to please God (v. 17)
 - C. You have no interest in maintaining façades (v. 18)
 - D. You burn your bridges to sin (v. 19)
 - E. You are willing to make sacrifices to be right (v. 19)
 - F. Constantly adding Bible verses and allowing the Scripture to conquer you ("grew mightily and prevailed") (v. 20)
 - G. Scripture finds soil to grow in your life (v. 20)
- II. Marks Of Relapse (Revelation 2:1-7)
 - A. Notice that relapse into sin can occur...
 - 1. Even when Christ's presence is in the church (v. 1-2)
 - 2. Those who are Christians (vv. 1-2)
 - 3. Those who are godly (v. 2)
 - 4. Those who have a good reputation for orthodoxy (v. 2)
 - 5. Those who are disciplined (vv. 2-3)
 - 6. Those who minister to others (v. 3)
 - 7. Those with endurance (v. 3)
 - 8. Hatred for certain grosser sins (v. 6)
 - 9. Therefore, even the mature should be on guard about danger if the following are present in their lives:
 - B. Loss of "first love" for God (v. 4)
 - C. Indifference to the loss of close relationship with God (v. 5a)
 - D. Losing our awareness of sin or of the need to repent (v. 5)
 - E. Slackening Zeal In The "First Works" (v. 5)

Conclusion