

# Overcoming through Faith

by Michael Rudolph

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It took me a while in the process of my becoming discipled to turn from using faith as a tool to achieve what I wanted, to its proper use which is to cement my relationship with God and to achieve what He wants. Shortly after becoming a believer, I was overly influenced by “Word of Faith” theology that uses (or should I rather say mis-uses) Scriptures on faith as a tool to attempt to manipulate God into giving me what I wanted – Scriptures such as Matthew 21:21-22 that says:

*“So Yeshua answered and said to them, “Assuredly, I say to you, if you have faith and do not doubt, you will not only do what was done to the fig tree, but also if you say to this mountain, ‘Be removed and be cast into the sea,’ it will be done. And whatever things you ask in prayer, believing, you will receive.”*

And: Mark 11:23-24:

*“For assuredly, I say to you, whoever says to this mountain, ‘Be removed and be cast into the sea,’ and does not doubt in his heart, but believes that those things he says will be done, he will have whatever he says. Therefore I say to you, whatever things you ask when you pray, believe that you receive them, and you will have them.”*

So, when I wanted something, or I wanted something to happen, I squinted my eyes, gnashed my teeth, balled my fist, and said to myself over and over “I believe! I believe!” And in that state of mind I asked God for whatever it was that I wanted and even, on occasion, attempted to “speak it” into existence by adding to it the words “in Yeshua’s name.” After all, if a mountain will throw itself into the sea just because I tell it to ... well, you get the point!

The problem was that much of what I prayed for that way did not come to pass. When I asked my “word of faith” mentors “why,” the answer they told me was always the same – that I was lacking in faith. But how much more faith could I have? I squinted my eyes in prayer so hard that I could barely open them afterwards, and my clenched fists are probably why I have arthritis in them today. I sensed that something was wrong in my approach, but the Scriptures seemed so clear and convincing.

Then the Lord graciously quickened a Scripture to me; it was Hebrews 11:1 which reads:

*“Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.”*

Mmmm, I thought ... The Scripture says that faith is “*the evidence of things not seen.*” But I was educated in both law and science and was trained to believe that if you cannot see a thing, touch it, smell it, taste it, hear it, or measure it with instruments, then it is not real and has no evidentiary value. So, was Hebrews 11:1 self-contradictory? An oxymoron? At first, I didn’t know what to think but then (with God’s help) understanding came to me. The only way a

person can be certain of something that he cannot detect with his five natural senses or with his instruments is if God reveals it to him. I had clear forgotten about our sixth sense which is our supernatural ability to hear the still small voice of God (1 Kings 19:12).

Once I realized my omission, Hebrews 11:1 made complete sense, and so did Matthew 21 and Mark 11 that say that if we command a mountain to '*Go and throw yourself into the sea!*' – '*it will be done!*' The faith that is needed to cause such things to happen is not according to what I want done, but rather according to what God wants done. In other words, true faith requires that we first hear God, and then respond by praying according to HIS will – not according to our own. It is consistent with 2 Corinthians 5:7, which says:

*“For we walk by faith, not by sight.”*

And also, Romans 10:17, which says:

*“So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.”*

I came to know that faith cannot be separated from first hearing the will of God, which is what “asking in Yeshua’s name” in John 14:13-14 means when it says:

*“And whatever you ask in My name, that I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If you ask anything in My name, I will do it.”*

And also, what “abiding in Yeshua” means in John 15:7 when it says:

*“If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you.”*

Both of these terms (and terms like them) mean that our prayers, if they are prayers of faith, must be what we hear to be God’s will – not ours. Of course, if God’s will and ours coincide, so much the better.

Well, that realization and John 15:4-5 are what got me away from “Word of Faith” theology. John 15:4-5 says:

*“Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me. I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing.”*

I now saw that Scripture completely contradicted the “Word of Faith” theology that I had been taught, which was that the authority to pray things into existence (and even command them into existence) had been given to me and me alone, and that the only thing I had to do to cause them to happen was to conjure up enough faith and tack “in Yeshua’s name” to my prayers, and “in Yeshua’s authority” to my proclamations.

Well, that was my first lesson in what it means to die to self. Apparently, I could not use my God-given authority to get what I wanted and instead, my lot in life as a believer was to do as Yeshua taught his disciples in Luke 9:23-24:

*“If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me. For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will save it.”*

And also, the Apostle Paul’s words in Galatians 2:20a:

*“I have been crucified with Messiah; it is no longer I who live, but Messiah lives in me;”*

Also, his words in Colossians 3:3:

*“For you died, and your life is hidden with Messiah in God.”*

Well, dying-to-self sounded yucky to me, but I concluded that what was, “was,” and I began to relax in the idea that God’s destiny for a believer in Messiah is to be a servant and not a *macher*.<sup>1</sup>

But what of Scriptures like 1 John 5:4-5?

*“For whatever is born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world-- our faith. Who is he who overcomes the world, but he who believes that Yeshua is the Son of God?”*

Or Scriptures like

*“As it is written: “For Your sake we are killed all day long; We are accounted as sheep for the slaughter.” Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us” (Romans 8:36-37).*

First, I am told that as a believer I have overcome the world, then I am told that I can be killed all day long as a sheep for the slaughter, but then I am told that that is okay because I am more than a conqueror. Well that does not sound very okay to me. What is Scripture trying to tell me? It is trying to tell me that, while I am eternally protected, in Messiah (i.e. my salvation is assured), my earthly existence must share the fallenness of the world and of the rest of humanity, and I therefore must prepare myself to endure some of the same hardships and adversities that befall all of mankind.

As I was preparing this message I noticed something that I had never before noticed, and that is how many verses there are in the Book of Revelation about overcoming:

Revelation 2:7b: *“To him who overcomes I will give to eat from the tree of life, which is in the midst of the Paradise of God.”*

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<sup>1</sup> Yiddish for “an important person.”

Revelation 2:11b: *“He who overcomes shall not be hurt by the second death.”*

Revelation 2:17b: *“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.”*

Revelation 2:26: *“And he who overcomes, and keeps My works until the end, to him I will give power over the nations—”*

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.”*

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.”*

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.”*

Revelation 12:21: *“He who overcomes shall inherit all things, and I will be his God and he shall be My son.”*

There must be something really important about overcoming for there to be so many verses of Scripture in Revelation that speak to it. And what does 1 John 4-5 mean when it says that I have “*overcome the world?*” When I become sick, how is that overcoming the world? You may have noticed that I have trouble walking. How is that overcoming the world? I believe that Paul gives us a glimpse into the answer when he says in 2 Timothy 4:5-7:

*“But you be watchful in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry. For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.”*

And Paul gives us the specific answer in 2 Corinthians 4:8-10; when he says:

*“We are hard pressed on every side, yet not crushed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed-- always carrying about in the body the dying of the Lord Yeshua, that the life of Yeshua also may be manifested in our body.”*

You see, the kind of overcoming for which believers are destined is not to be taken out of the world or to be totally protected from the sins of others and from the fallenness of man, but rather to be given the spiritual armor by Yeshua to be “*hard pressed and yet not crushed; perplexed but not in despair; persecuted but not forsaken; struck down but not destroyed.*”

Yeshua himself is our greatest example as we read, in Psalms 22:6-16, the prophetic account of the torment that he was destined to endure in his future execution:

*“But I am a worm, and no man; A reproach of men, and despised by the people. All those who see Me ridicule Me; They shoot out the lip, they shake the head, saying, “He trusted in the LORD, let Him rescue Him; Let Him deliver Him, since He delights in Him!” But You are He who took Me out of the womb; You made Me trust while on My mother's breasts. I was cast upon You from birth. From My mother's womb You have been My God. Be not far from Me, For trouble is near; For there is none to help. Many bulls have surrounded Me; Strong bulls of Bashan have encircled Me. They gape at Me with their mouths, Like a raging and roaring lion. I am poured out like water, And all My bones are out of joint; My heart is like wax; It has melted within Me. My strength is dried up like a potsherd, And My tongue clings to My jaws; You have brought Me to the dust of death. For dogs have surrounded Me; The congregation of the wicked has enclosed Me. They pierced My hands and My feet;”*

In his torturous misery, Yeshua calls out to his heavenly Father:

*“But You, O LORD, do not be far from Me; O My Strength, hasten to help Me!*  
(Psalms 22:6-19)

So, we (like Paul and Yeshua) will have to endure that which all of mankind endures, but our faith will protect us from being destroyed so that we may finish our race here on earth as both Paul and Yeshua did, victoriously. And remember the lesson taught in Hebrew 11:6:

*“But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.”*

Are you an overcomer of life's adversities and hardships, or are you thrown into fear, depression and despair by them? If you know that you are vulnerable and need more faith, please come up for prayer at the close of the service.