

Our Occupation: Reigning with Christ

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Introduction

I have taken this course about those who have been brought before me as Christians. I asked them whether they were Christians or not? If they confessed that they were Christians, I asked them again, and a third time, intermixing threatenings with the questions. If they persevered in their confession, I ordered them to be executed.... These examinations made me think it necessary to inquire by torments what the truth was; which I did of two servant maids, who were called Deaconesses: but still I discovered no more than that they were addicted to a bad and to an extravagant superstition.

Thus Pliny, the Roman Governor of Bithynia in 112 A.D., wrote Emperor Trajan seeking advice on preventing the criminal behavior of *being* a Christian. These early Christians endured what many would consider unimaginable: torture and execution for Christ. Why would they do this? The only intelligible answer is that they were convinced of the resurrection of Jesus from the dead and that they held to the promise for themselves of a glorious life after death.¹ While chained in a Roman prison Paul wrote about this promise:²

Here is a trustworthy saying:

If we died with him, we will also live with him; if we endure, *we will also reign with him*. If we disown him, he will also disown us; if we are faithless, he will remain faithful, for he cannot disown himself.³

Keep reminding them of these things.

Paul says if we endure then we will reign with Christ! He calls this a trustworthy saying. In other words, here's something we can bank on. Here's a Christian maxim, a sort of creedal statement, an early church memory verse. And the promise tells us to stay faithful during hardship (that is, when facing pain, suffering, rejection, and even death) because, if we do, then we will reign with Christ. Paul says, "keep reminding them of these things." In other words, don't let them forget.

But what does this mean? To find out, we will need to examine some related words. They are: endure, overcome, conquer, and reign.

Endure means to stay put in hardship, to stand one's ground or hold out in trouble affliction and persecution.⁴ In other words, we must overcome what comes against us, we must hang in there, and when we do, we will reign. Every child who has played king of the hill understands that some victories are about holding on to what you have.

Overcome is from the Greek word *nike* (where Nike athletic shoes gets its name). *Nike* means to forcefully overcome, to be victorious over, and to conquer.⁵ Paul tells us to "overcome evil with good" and 1 John 5:4 tells us that we *will* overcome, for "everyone born of God overcomes the world."⁶ Reigning and overcoming go hand in hand because if you don't endure through an attack, in other words, if others conquer you, then you no longer reign: they do. Thus I will use *endure*, *overcome*, and *conquer* interchangeably because they mean about the same thing and they all are part of reigning because unless we do them, we don't reign.

Reign means to have a kingly rule. In the Bible the word is used of God, of earthly kings, and of the saints who have been called to rule with God.⁷

So let us look at what the Bible teaches about humankind's reign and trace its history from the first humans to the Saint's reign with Christ forever.

The Lord originally created us to reign

Human reigning, or ruling, is found in the first chapter of the first book of the Bible. Even more amazing (at least to me) is that we find it in the Bible's first sentence concerning humankind. And this brings me to my first point: it has always been God's plan that we should reign. The Lord God created the universe and stars and planets, and created the earth, and then the animal kingdom and then God said, "Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and *let them rule*⁸ over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground." So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them."⁹

So the first thing that God, the ruler of the universe, says about making us in His image is "let them rule." That God rules or reigns is, of course, one of the most fundamental things that we know of Him, so if He is going to make us in His image, then it shouldn't surprise us that we would be designed to rule, to "subdue" the earth, to conquer it and bring it under control. Dallas Willard comments that, "This is the core of the likeness or image of God in us and is the basis of the destiny for which we were formed.... In creating human beings God made them to rule, to reign, to have dominion in a limited sphere."¹⁰

Adam and Eve, then, had to remain steadfast, to hold their ground, to endure because if someone or something else conquered them, then they would no longer rule: their conqueror would. And, of course, that's exactly what happened. Satan deceived Eve so she disobeyed God and ate from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil.¹¹ Adam then also ate. This ended the reign of Adam and Eve and brings me to my second point.

Satan conquered our first parents so he reigned instead

Let us be clear: the day Satan got Adam and Eve to rebel, he won a great victory and conquered the human race.¹² Because Adam and Eve succumbed to Satan, God forced them out of the garden; and their descendants (that would be us) now get sick and injured, are at odds with evil spiritual forces, and we all die.

That's why, after the Lord destroys humankind with a flood, He tells Noah's family to "Be fruitful and increase in number and fill the earth," but He does not tell them to rule or have dominion because it was too late. Ruling was no longer available.¹³

It is also why, when the devil tempted Jesus and showed Him all the kingdoms of the world and offered Him "all their authority and splendor, *for it has been given to me*, and I can give it to anyone I want to,"¹⁴ Jesus doesn't disagree.¹⁵

Therefore, Jesus tells us that unbelievers are under the "power of Satan"¹⁶ and that people aren't just sinners, but that "everyone who sins is a slave to sin."¹⁷ Paul says that unbelievers are not just in darkness but under the "authority" or "dominion of darkness,"¹⁸ that, in fact, unbelievers are trapped by "the devil, who has taken them captive to do his will."¹⁹ John says that those who do not do God's will are "children of the devil"²⁰ and so it is no surprise that Jesus would even tell the Pharisees, the outwardly good people of their day, "You *belong* to your father, the devil."²¹ Jesus calls Satan the ruler of this world²² and John tells us, "that the whole world is under the control of the evil one."²³ This is the sad state of affairs that we were all born into. We were all "dead" in sin. We were all "by nature objects of wrath," and we all, writes Paul, followed "the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work *in* those who are disobedient."²⁴ All of us, instead of reigning, were blinded by Satan, subject to his rule, and born into sin. We all suffer and die because of it. This was because Adam and Eve, our first

parents, didn't endure the temptation but allowed themselves, and therefore their family, to be conquered by the Evil one. This brings me to my third point.

Therefore Christ conquered to rescue us from Satan's reign

Jesus overcame and rescued us from Satan's reign. Hebrews tells us that by His death He destroyed "him who holds the power of death—that is, the devil."²⁵ Paul also tells us that Jesus "disarmed the powers and authorities" and "made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross."²⁶ Notice that the victory over Satan and his minions wasn't through Christ's resurrection but through His death on the cross.

This is important because how Jesus conquered explains how we conquer. Simply put, Jesus conquered by enduring suffering, not by avoiding it. Jesus could have avoided the cross; He tells us He could have called down more than twelve legions of angels.²⁷ But Jesus knew that to conquer in the spiritual realm he had to suffer in the physical realm, and so He allowed himself to suffer humiliation, excruciating torture, and death. Jesus knew that there is another realm of spiritual beings and that satisfaction must be had there. Jesus wasn't trying to prove anything to humans—He'll do that soon enough. That's why Jesus said that if His kingdom were of this world, His "servants would fight," but His kingdom was from another place.²⁸ He accepted apparent defeat in the world we can see in order to destroy the Devil's work in the realm we can't.²⁹ Revelation portrays this ironic victory:

And I saw a mighty angel proclaiming in a loud voice, "Who is worthy to break the seals and open the scroll?" But no one in heaven or on earth or under the earth could open the scroll or even look inside it. I wept and wept because no one was found who was worthy to open the scroll or look inside. Then one of the elders said to me, "Do not weep! See,

the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has triumphed [conquered].³⁰ He is able to open the scroll and its seven seals.”³¹

How does John describe this conqueror?

Then I saw *a Lamb, looking as if it had been slain*,³² standing in the center of the throne, encircled by the four living creatures and the elders.”

Here is an ironic victory: Jesus, the slaughtered lamb, conquered. What a strange image.³³ Jesus suffered insults, beatings, and even physical torture on the cross in order to accomplish God’s will, and by this He conquered Satan and freed us from his reign.

Satan feared this. Thus when Jesus tells his disciples that He must suffer and be killed, Peter tells him “Never, Lord!” Jesus’ rebuke is unexpected: “Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; you do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men.”^{34 35} The next thing Jesus tells His disciples is, “If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me....” In other words, to follow Jesus we too must suffer.³⁶ But this suffering also gives us victory. As Millard Erickson put it, “God himself became the victim of evil so that he and we might be victors over evil.”³⁷

Now we conquer Satan, his minions, and the world

Jesus freed us, but now we war with Satan. That’s why Paul tells us: “For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.”³⁸ The word “struggle” literally means wrestle and speaks of the intimacy of our fight. We engage Satan in close combat so Paul tells us to “put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand.”³⁹

“Stand” is another way of saying “endure.” We are told to flee temptation, but never the devil. The Bible tells us that Satan “schemes”⁴⁰ against us, tries to outwit⁴¹ us, and certainly tempts⁴² us, but we are not to give him a “foothold.”⁴³ Peter likens the devil to a “roaring lion” seeking to “devour” us, but tells us to “resist him, standing firm in the faith.”⁴⁴ James also tells us to resist the devil and he will flee.

Since our struggle isn’t against humans, the Lord’s *ultimate* goal for us isn’t that we conquer them or their institutions. His ultimate goal for us isn’t for victory in boardrooms or on battlefields (although, on occasion, that is part of it). The victory He’s interested in isn’t measured with financial statements, in batting or earned run averages, in salaries, in sales, or in medals. Our victory is different. We resist and overcome evil—the evil that deceives nations and kills everyone; the evil that fools angels and humans into rebellion against God. We overcome the evil that leads all who surrender to hell. God has called us to conquer evil and that is what we do right now. This is exceedingly more than the simple accumulation of knowledge—we learn to “overcome evil with good.”⁴⁵

With this in view we see that spiritual battles rage as fiercely around dining room tables, in break-rooms, and while surfing the Internet as on a battlefield. This is because the fiercest battles with the most significant consequences aren’t over bodies, but souls. That’s what Jesus was talking about when He said, “Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell.”⁴⁶ Physical death is small compared to spiritual death.

Since our enemies are spiritual, the major question regards the nature of our overcoming *them*. I have already pointed out that we must conquer like Jesus conquered. Jesus willingly suffered outward or worldly defeat in order to conquer in the spiritual realm, and for us to

conquer we must do likewise (and sooner or later we must conquer even to death). The world may view our suffering for Jesus as defeat, but in the spiritual realm we conquer. In Revelation we saw that the slain lamb conquered, and in Romans there is an amazing parallel:

Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword?⁴⁷ As it is written:

“For your sake we face death all day long;
we are considered as *sheep to be slaughtered*.”⁴⁸

No, in all *these* things we are *more than conquerors*⁴⁹ through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death⁵⁰ nor life, neither angels nor demons,⁵¹ neither the present nor the future, nor any powers,⁵² neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.⁵³

Paul asks what might separate us from the love of Christ, and he seems to anticipate someone asking, “If Christ loves us, why do we suffer?” Paul answers that our enduring hardship and suffering, far from being evidence that God doesn’t love us, is exactly a sign of His love because we conquer *through* them. In fact, Paul tells us that it has been “granted” to us to suffer for Christ.⁵⁴ In other words, our suffering is God doing us a favor. So, Paul tells us that, like Jesus, we face suffering, evil and death; that, like Jesus, we are considered sheep to be slaughtered; and that, like Jesus, we are more than conquerors.⁵⁵ We conquer hardship, sickness, ridicule, suffering, and even death. And again, we actually conquer through these things—we don’t conquer by avoiding them. I am not for a minute suggesting that we shouldn’t take an aspirin for a headache. Certainly, we can and should avoid needless suffering.⁵⁶ But in times where there is no righteous recourse but suffering, we conquer through enduring.

We conquer when we believe obeying God thwarts the most evil and powerful foes any human ever faced. Even if killed, we conquer when we remain faithful. Thus of the Revelation saints we read, “They overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony; they did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death.”⁵⁷

Let me give some examples. When a man tells his coworkers that he can’t see a movie because it’s immoral, even though he’ll be called a prude, he conquers. When a couple faithfully fulfills their commitment to a church ministry, meeting after meeting, without acknowledgment, they conquer. When a woman politely encourages a Christian friend to stop lying but is rejected, she conquers. When a woman risks losing friends because she politely refuses to hear them gossip, she conquers. When a couple gives the poor money instead of buying a nicer car or securing a better retirement, they conquer. When parents refuse their teen something risqué that “all the other parents” allow, they conquer. When a woman remains kind to an unkind husband, she conquers. When a woman refuses to marry a non-Christian even though she suspects it is (and may in reality be) her last chance to enjoy marriage, she conquers. When a man cares for his invalid wife and thanks God, he conquers. When a man lives long enough to watch his spouse and all his friends die, but honors God and refuses to complain, he conquers. When you are bored and would love to watch TV, but don’t because you can’t find anything fit to see, you conquer. When you are insulted but you bite your tongue, you conquer. When you get cancer, but remain faithful and thankful, you conquer (even if it kills you). These require the endurance which results from faith—the conviction of an unseen world.

Consider Job. His children liked each other and he was rich and famous. But one day Satan told God that Job only worshipped Him because his life was easy. So the Lord let Satan orchestrate the death of his children, the theft of his property, and the ruin of his health. His wife

told him to “curse God and die.” What did Job have to do to route Satan in front of the Creator and His angels? He only had to do one thing: steadfastly honor God. As long as Job patiently endured the suffering and evil, he humiliated Satan in front of the Creator and His angels.⁵⁸

So with us. When things go wrong and we continue to honor God, we conquer. But we don’t overcome if we resort to gossip, lies, grumbling, sexual fantasy, drugs and other disobedience.⁵⁹ Enduring, overcoming, conquering and finally reigning happen when we honor God through whatever hardships come our way. As Thomas A Kempis put it, “He who knows best how to suffer will enjoy the greater peace, because he is that conqueror of himself, the master of the world, a friend of Christ, and an heir of heaven.”⁶⁰

Let me give one more example that I hesitate to share. On the day the doctor called to tell me that I had “a mass” on my spine, I walked into Jean E.’s office (she works at home) and we prayed, with tears streaming down our faces, and thanked God for what He had allowed. And then the whirlwind began. Quickly I saw specialist, who ordered a biopsy, and after having the biopsy done we waited again to hear the result. Well, finally (it had only been a few days) the doctor told me that the biopsy revealed that I had a very severe form of cancer and that, although he hadn’t seen the slides himself, would be treated by chemo and then, after six months or so, if the tumor shrank, they might opt to operate. That staggered us and after we hung up, we met in the hallway, and, again with tears streaming down our faces, we thanked God. Thanking God was an act of obedience but even in one of the darkest day of our lives, I sensed victory. I had learned from Job and the thought crossed my mind that we had pleased God. I do not mean, in full, honest disclosure, that there weren’t some dark moments—there were. I only mean that we had decided to be thankful and that we forcefully chose to thank God, regardless of our future on this earth, and that brought me a sense of conquering in hardship that served as an anchor for our

stormy lives. Our reaction was possible because we had decided, years in advance, not to complain but to honor God no matter what.

But I imagine some might object. First, I expect some will think (as I have) that this is all very nice, but hardly the Navy SEAL type of conquering. And they would be right: Navy SEALs are tough men, but make no mistake, unless these men also know Christ, that is all they are: tough men. To conquer in the spiritual realm they need be much more. Consider that even Christian girls endured prolonged tortures in the Roman Coliseum for Christ. The young mothers Perpetua and Felicitas (both of them having recently nursed their children) willingly faced wild beasts in the Roman Coliseum rather than disown Christ.⁶¹ Overcoming spiritually is unrelated to physical prowess or financial resources, and the Christian quadriplegic who battles to control her thoughts and her tongue may daily conquer greater obstacles than the most physically capable soldier in a firefight.⁶² Every Christian's greatest challenge is to learn to reign in his or her brain.

Second, some may object that reigning is too arrogant: they want to be humble Christians. But as C. S. Lewis wrote, "To shrink back from the plan is not humility; it is laziness and cowardice. To submit to it is not conceit or megalomania; it is obedience."⁶³

Third, others might object that this might lead people to become very good doormats. But nothing could be further from the truth. A doormat doesn't stand for anything. The Christian isn't a pushover; those who give way to evil are.

And finally, those discouraged over habitual sins may think overcoming impossible. I did for years. But now I've followed Christ for 40 years and have seen enough of His work in my life to know He can and will finish the rest. Of course, some Christians, like the thief on the cross, will not get much chance to conquer evil here but we can be sure that if that man had lived that he certainly would have conquered.

This happens, as John tells us, because “everyone born of God overcomes the world. This is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith.”⁶⁴ In other words, those really in Christ, have been adopted into God’s family, are born again by the Spirit of God and so it is then our very nature to conquer. Adam’s children will sin, Christ’s children will conquer sin. Thus John wrote, “You, dear children, are from God and have overcome them, because the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world.”⁶⁵ Satan is no match for the Christian who perseveres while the Lord works His character in us.

And this brings me to my last point.

And we will reign for ever and ever

Through overcoming evil, God prepares us to reign forever. We saw in the first chapter of the first book of the Bible that He created humankind to rule, and now in the last chapter of the last book of the Bible we read perhaps the most thrilling verse in the Bible: “There will be no more night. They will not need the light of a lamp or the light of the sun, for the Lord God will give them light. And they will reign for ever and ever.”⁶⁶ The middle of the Bible reveals the same: “But the saints of the Most High will receive the kingdom and will possess it forever—yes, for ever and ever.... Then the sovereignty, power and greatness of the kingdoms under the whole heaven will be handed over to the saints, the people of the Most High. His kingdom will be an everlasting kingdom, and all rulers will worship and obey him.”⁶⁷

In Revelation Jesus also tells us that the one “who overcomes” will receive “authority over the nations... just as I received authority from my Father” and Jesus tells us that the one who overcomes “will get the right to sit with Jesus on His throne “just as I *overcame* and sat down with my Father on his throne.”⁶⁸ And with these blessings, Jesus tells us “he who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.”⁶⁹

Reigning, by definition, means to have authority over creatures. Adam and Eve were to reign over all the creatures in the air, on the land, and in the sea, and there is nothing that tells us that we won't be reigning over some creatures. G. K. Beale writes that the saints will "have such intimate fellowship with God that they not only take on his name... but also become associated with his throne... to such a degree that they are said to 'reign forever and ever.'"⁷⁰

And in Revelation 21 overcome is used one last time: "He who was seated on the throne said, 'I am making everything new!' Then he said, 'Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true.' He said to me: 'It is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. To him who is thirsty I will give to drink without cost from the spring of the water of life. He who overcomes will inherit all this, and I will be his God and he will be my son.'"⁷¹

Satan's doom is sure and we, writes Paul in 1 Corinthians 6:1-2, will not only "judge the world" but will "judge angels."⁷² In Luke 19 Jesus tells those faithful over small things in this life to take charge of "cities" and so Dallas Willard asks, "Perhaps it would be a good exercise for each of us to ask ourselves: Really, how many cities could I now govern under God? If, for example, Baltimore or Liverpool were turned over to me, with power to do what I want with it, how would things turn out? An honest answer to this question might do much to prepare us for our eternal future in this universe."⁷³

All of this for the overcomer, the conqueror, and the one who will reign.

You see, as Dallas Willard wrote, "The intention of God is that we should each become the kind of person whom he can set free in his universe, empowered to do what *we* want to do."⁷⁴ After all, on Earth, isn't it every parent's goal to discipline their children and even force them to endure hardship (like homework and vegetables) so that one day they will be on their own to live a full life doing what *they* want to do?

Perhaps all this sounds too good? Does this seem like Snow White or Sleeping Beauty who end up under a witch’s evil spell until finally a good prince comes and rescues them? Does this seem like a fairy tale? Well, if you think that you have it exactly backwards: fairy tales seem like this. The foundation of Christianity is that God exists and that God rewards those who diligently seek Him (Heb. 11:6) and the revelation of Christ predates the stories compiled by the brothers Grimm.⁷⁵

In other words, He is giving us the Kingdom; not just any kingdom, but *The* Kingdom; and once He comes, there will be no other. We get it all. This isn’t the Disneyland all-day pass or even the all year passport. This is the deed to the property. He is giving us a controlling interest in part of Heaven. He talks about cities, He talks about True Riches, He tells us to be faithful over things here; but then He tells us that the things here, the things that seem so big to us; are small. But, if we think these small things big, what will it be when we see really big things?

Well, Really Big Things come: and we are going to reign over them forever and we are going to do this with Jesus. That is God’s plan for our lives and that has always been the plan.

¹ The second century satirist Lucian writes of the Christians: “These misguided creatures start with the general conviction that they are immortal for all time, which explains the contempt of death and voluntary self-devotion which are so common among them.”

² We sometimes fail to comprehend the Roman prison’s horror. Eyewitnesses tell us they were vile. Their toilets were buckets and they typically didn’t have the smallest of windows (any ventilation the result of the opening and then closing of the prison door) so they reeked of perspiration, vomit, feces, and urine. At night they were cold and unlit so that prisoners wouldn’t see what bit them. Prisoners were filthy, their hair matted, their skin soiled; and their sweat rusted the iron chains sometimes fusing them to their ankles or wrists. See *Paul in Roman Prison*.

³ “Endure,” ὑπομένω, “means generally ‘remain’ or ‘stay behind.’ Among its derived meanings, that of ‘endure’ in trouble, affliction, or persecution is dominant in the NT and is seen here in the second line of the saying.... The NT relates what is involved in enduring: Believers endure hatred by all for Christ’s sake (Mt. 10:22 par. Mk. 13:13; cf. Mt. 24:13), they persevere in tribulation (Rom. 12:12), they endure great sufferings (Heb. 10:32) and temptation (Jas. 1:12), and they patiently endure suffering for doing good (1 Pe. 2:20).” George W. Knight, *The Pastoral Epistles: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1992), 404. Those who disown or deny Christ don’t endure. “The denial can also manifest itself in the moral realm. Some may ‘profess to know God, but by their deeds deny him’ (Tit. 1:16; cf. 1 Tim. 5:8).” Knight, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 406. “Reign with him,” συμβασιλεύσομεν, only occurs twice in the NT (here and 1 Cor. 4:8 “Already you have all you want! Already you have become rich! You have become kings [βασιλεύω]—and that without us! How I wish that you really had become kings so that we might be kings with you [συμβασιλεύω]!” Of this verse Knight comments, “Paul criticizes

those who think and act as if they were already reigning with Christ. He wishes that it were so and then speaks of this present age as one in which ‘when we are persecuted, we endure’ (4:12).” Knight, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 405.

⁴ Endure means to “remain instead of fleeing... stand one’s ground, hold out, endure in trouble affliction, persecution...” William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and other Early Christian Literature* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1957), 853.

⁵ nikaō: “**1.** intr. *Be victor, prevail, conquer*—**a.** in a battle or contest **b.** in a legal action **2.** trans. *conquer, overcome, vanquish.*” Arndt & Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1969), 541. There are some other words in the NT translated overcome but *nike* is most common.

⁶ I. Howard Marshall comments on this verse: “How, then, can the believer keep God’s commandments? John’s answer is that he has been given the power by God to overcome the forces of temptation which would prevent obedience.... To believe that Jesus has been victorious is to have the power that enables us to win the battle, for we know that our foe is already defeated and therefore powerless. And it is precisely faith that we need. To the natural man the power of evil appears uncontrollable, and to the weak Christian the force of temptation appears irresistible. It requires a firm belief in Jesus to enable us to dismiss this appearance of irresistible, uncontrollable evil as being merely an appearance. Nor is such faith a means of escape from conflict; on the contrary it is right in the middle of evil’s display of power that the believer is able to call its bluff and proclaim the superior might of Jesus.”

I. Howard Marshall, *The Epistles of John*, NICNT (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1978), 228, 229.

⁷ basileuō: “**1.** *be king, rule.*—**a.** of temporal princes **b.** of God and those closely united w. him—**α.** God **β.** Christ **γ.** God and Christ together **δ.** Saints, who have been called to rule w. God Ro 5: 17b; Rv 5:10... 20:4, 6; 22:5 (cf. Da 7:27). **2.** *become king, obtain royal power.*” Arndt and Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, 136.

⁸ Gordon Wenham comments: “Thus, like ‘image,’ *exercise dominion* reflects royal language. Man is created to rule.” Gordon Wenham, *Word Biblical Commentary: Vol. 1 Genesis 1-15* (Nashville: Nelson, 1987), 138.

⁹ Gen. 1:26-27. “The language of 1:26 reflects this idea of a royal figure representing God as his appointed ruler. This appears to be the understanding of Psalm 8, which focuses on human dominion, though without explicit mention of the ‘image’ or ‘likeness.’ This is further indicated by the term ‘rule’ (*rādā*) in 1:26,28, which is used commonly of royal dominion. Human jurisdiction over animate life in the skies, waters, and land corresponds to the ‘rule’ (*māšal*) of the sun and moon over the inanimate sphere of creation. Our passage declares that all people, not just kings, have the special status of royalty in the eyes of God. It is striking that God consigns jurisdiction to one of his creatures, since the major tenet of 1:1-2:3 is the sovereignty of God’s creative word. It was this feature of creation that so astonished the psalmist; for him the Infinite One crowned human infancy with the glory of his rule (8:5-8[6-9]).” Kenneth A. Matthews, *The New American Commentary: Genesis 1-11:26* (Broadman & Holman, 1996), 169-170. Notice that it was the entire earth they were to subdue. Wenham explains the nature of the rule: “Man’s divinely given commission to rule over all other living creatures is tempered, or better, brought into sharp relief, by that fact that such dominion does not allow him to kill these creatures or to use their flesh as food. Only much later (9:3, post-Flood) is domination extended to include consumption. Of the two verbs *rādā*, ‘exercise dominion,’ and *kābaš*, ‘subdue,’ the latter connotes more force. Thus it refers to subjecting someone to slavery (2 Chr. 28:10; Neh. 5:5; Jer. 34:11, 16), to physical abuse and assault (Esth. 7:8), to treading (sins) under foot (Mic. 7:19 and Zech. 9:15, where it parallels ‘devour’), and to militarily subjecting the population of a city (Num. 32:22, 29; Josh. 18:1). All these references suggest violence or a display of force. For reasons already indicated, it appears unlikely that we need to transfer the nuance of force and dictatorship into the use of *kābaš* in Gen. 1:28. Probably what is designated here is settlement and agriculture....” Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, 139-140.

¹⁰ Dallas Willard, *The Divine Conspiracy* (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1998), 21.

¹¹ The serpent or snake is clearly identified with Satan: Rev. 12:9, “The great dragon was hurled down—that ancient serpent called the devil, or Satan, who leads the whole world astray. He was hurled to the earth, and his angels with him.” Also, Rev. 20:2: “He seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the devil, or Satan, and bound him for a thousand years.” Matthews writes: “In accord with the traditional opinion, the snake is more than a literal snake; rather it is Satan’s personal presence in the garden. We may interpret the role of the serpent in the same vein as Peter’s resistance to Jesus’ death, where the Lord responded to Peter: “Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me. You do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men” (Matt 16:23). Jesus does not mean Peter is possessed with Satan as Judas was when “Satan entered” him (Luke 22:3), nor was he threatened with possession (Luke 22:31. But Peter unwittingly was an advocate for Satan’s cause.” Matthews, *Genesis 1-11:26*, 234.

¹² Albert Baylis: “It is a satanic *coup d’etat!* Satan not only incites them to sin in direct disobedience and rebellion against a divine command, but the sin also directly flouts the divine order. Humanity’s charge to rule over the beasts

is violated, and Adam capitulates his moral leadership.” Albert H. Baylis, *From Creation to the Cross: Understanding the First Half of the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1996), 46. Henri Blocher similarly comments, “The fact that the other party takes the form of an animal (the text underlines that the snake belonged to that category, Gn. 3:1) is not an insignificant detail. Reptiles were a part of the animal kingdom over which the man and the woman were to have dominion. If, as they sin, they obey the snake, there is evidence that orders established at creation are being twisted and smashed with violation of the divine covenant, either directly in the commission of the offense, or else in the repercussions....” Henri Blocher, *In the Beginning: The Opening Chapters of Genesis* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1984), 142.

¹³ Matthews comments on the lack of dominion: “Since 1:28 forms the background to the blessing (9:1), it is striking that the charge to ‘subdue’ and ‘rule’ (1:28b) is absent. This admits that the new circumstances of the sin-burdened world have altered this aspect of the Adamic blessing, which now will be difficult to accomplish in the hostile environs of the new world.” Matthews further comments: “This appears remarkably different from the relationship that the first man and woman enjoyed in the garden with their animal residents (2:19-20). This would also be true of Noah’s animal companions on board the ark, where evidently there was a docile relationship. It is saying too much of the narrative to suppose that before the Noahic covenant there were no carnivorous animals. Rather, the Lord is formally announcing that this new enmity against humans cannot win out because the animal order is ‘given in your hands’ (v. 2). This expression describes the divine provision of Israel’s victory over its enemies (e.g., Exod 23:31) and the handing over of a murderer to the blood-avenger (Deut 19:12). God has now put the life and death of the animal under the power of the human arbiter.” Matthews, *Genesis 1-11:26*, 400, 401.

¹⁴ Luke 4:5-7.

¹⁵ Bock: “The meaning of the offer was clear: if Jesus would give Satan his heart and bow down before him, Satan would let Jesus rule.” Darrell L. Bock, *Luke*, BECNT (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1994), 377.

¹⁶ Acts 26:18.

¹⁷ John 8:34.

¹⁸ Col. 1:18.

¹⁹ 2 Tim. 2:26.

²⁰ 1 John 3:10.

²¹ John 8:44.

²² John 12:31, 14:30; and 16:11. Ruler is from the present participle of (αρχηο): *ruler, chief*.

²³ 1 John 5:19.

²⁴ Eph. 2:1-3.

²⁵ Heb.2:14-15. “The devil did not possess control over death inherently but gained his power when he seduced humankind to rebel against God.... The primary goal of the incarnation was the Son’s participation in death, through which he nullified the devil’s ability to enslave the children of God through fear of death.” William L. Lane, *Word Biblical Commentary: Hebrews 1-8* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1991), 61. Beale: “Through his death Jesus nullified the devil’s power to put others to death (Heb. 2:14) and took this power for himself (Rev. 1:18). Beale, *Revelation*, 659.

²⁶ Col. 2:15.

²⁷ “The principal unit of the Roman army comprising 3000 to 6000 foot soldiers with cavalry.” Merriam-Webster: <http://www.merriam-webster.com/cgi-bin/dictionary?book=Dictionary&va=legion>, Accessed 1-24-05.

²⁸ John 18:36.

²⁹ Of course, Jesus disciples often misunderstood this. That’s why in Matt. 16, when Jesus explained that he would have to suffer at the hands of the elders and be killed, Peter rebuked him: “no, Lord, this shall never happen to you!” And then Jesus says something that strange. He tells Peter, “get behind me, *Satan!* You are a stumbling block to me; you do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men.” The trouble is that Peter looked only from the human point of view and couldn’t imagine Jesus, the messiah of Israel, killed. But Satan knew that Jesus’ submitting to suffering would defeat him. As Carson points out, at the temptation Satan had “already offered Jesus kingship without suffering.” D. A. Carson, *The Expositors Bible Commentary, Volume 8*, Frank E. Gaebelien, ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Regency, 1984), 337.

³⁰ “1. intr. *Be victor, prevail, conquer*—a. in a battle or contest b. in a legal action 2. trans. *conquer, overcome, vanquish*.” Arndt and Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, 541.

³¹ Rev. 5:2-8.

³² Beale: “The slain Lamb thus represents the image of a conqueror who was mortally wounded while defeating an enemy. Christ’s death, the end-time sacrifice of the messianic Lamb, becomes interpreted as a sacrifice that not only redeems but also conquers.” Beale, 351 “He was physically defeated but spiritually victorious. He willingly

submitted to the unjust penalty of death, which was imposed on him ultimately by the devil. As an innocent victim he became a representative penal substitute for the sins of his people. While he was suffering the defeat of death, he was also overcoming by creating a kingdom of redeemed subjects over whom he would reign and over whom the devil would no longer have power.... This does not mean that the Lamb's resurrection is not conceived of as a victory but only that there is an intention to highlight the death as a victory." Beale, 353.

³³ Of course, Jesus didn't have to die. Matt. 26:53: "Do you think I cannot call on my Father, and he will at once put at my disposal more than twelve legions of angels?" But Jesus knew that to conquer, he must die. John 18:36: Jesus said, "My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jews. But now my kingdom is from another place."

³⁴ Although the New Testament reveals that non-believers are often tormented by Satan, they are not technically in conflict with him. Acts 26:17: "I will rescue you from your own people and from the Gentiles. I am sending you to them to open their eyes and turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, so that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me." Dead sharks look menacing even though dead. A dead lion is still a formidable sight. But lambs aren't intimidating even when they're alive.

³⁵ Mat. 16:23.

³⁶ Mat. 16:24.

³⁷ Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 456.

³⁸ Eph. 6:12.

³⁹ Eph. 6:13.

⁴⁰ 2 Cor. 2:11, Eph. 6:11.

⁴¹ 2 Cor. 2:11.

⁴² 1 Cor. 7:5.

⁴³ Eph. 4:27.

⁴⁴ 1 Pet. 5:8.

⁴⁵ Rom. 12:21.

⁴⁶ Mat. 10:28.

⁴⁷ Satan has always been the accuser: Job 1:6-11, 2:1-6; Zech. 3:1-2, Rev. 12:10. But once Christ died for us then the devil no longer had any basis for his accusation against the saints. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, NIGCT (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999), 659. Hebrews 2:14-15: The devil was the accuser and he held the power of death. Through Christ we have now overcome [conquered] those legal challenges so that "death" nor angels or principalities can separate us from the kingdom of God. Paul was beheaded by Nero in 67 A.D.

⁴⁸ "As sheep of slaughter... we overwhelmingly conquer." Beale, *Revelation*, 270.

⁴⁹ Greek 5245, NASB υπερνικαιο; from Greek 5228 (ηυπερ) and Greek 3528 (νικαιο); *to be more than conqueror*:—overwhelmingly conquer. Used only here in the NT. Beale translates it: "As sheep of slaughter... we overwhelmingly conquer." Beale, *Revelation*, 270.

⁵⁰ Beale: "Through his death Jesus nullified the devil's power to put others to death (Heb. 2:14) and took this power for himself (Rev. 1:18). Therefore, the devil no longer had any basis for his accusations against the saints, since the penalty that they deserved and that he pleaded for had at least been exacted at Christ's death." Beale, *Revelation*, 659.

⁵¹ "Demons" is probably best translated "rulers" from the Greek. Greek 746, NASB αρχηε; from Greek 757 (αρχηο); *beginning, origin*. Moo comments: "Sometimes [Paul] uses it [αρχηε] to denote powers or authorities of the spirit world, sometimes those of an evil nature (Eph. 6:12; Col. 2:15) but also in a general way that makes it difficult to know whether evil, or evil and good, spirit 'rulers' generally are meant. If 'angels' refers to 'good' angels, it is natural to think that 'rulers' denotes spiritual powers, but the lexical evidence makes it impossible to be sure." Douglas Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, TNICNT (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1996), 545.

⁵² Moo writes of "powers": "Since Paul uses the word to denote miracles [1 Cor. 12:10, 28-29; 2 Cor. 12:12], he may mean that nothing of such a nature—performed perhaps by Satan—can threaten our security as believers. But the occurrence of 'powers' with 'rulers' to denote spiritual beings suggests rather that some kind of spiritual forces are denoted here." Moo, *Romans*, 545-546.

⁵³ In Rom. 8:31 Paul asks, "if God is for us, who can be against us?" and in the verses that follow he seems to answer a natural questions that might arise. Namely, if God is for us, why do we suffer so? But Paul's point is that we conquer in the mistreatment. The suffering isn't strange or unusual: it is precisely the plan.

⁵⁴ Phil. 1:29.

⁵⁵ Beale: “Christ’s conquering is ironically interpreted as accomplished through his death on the cross. Likewise, the description of suffering saints who overcome in Rom. 8:36-37 is strikingly similar to that of Rev. 5:5-6.” Beale, *Revelation*, 270.

⁵⁶ By endure suffering I mean that we learn to honor God without complaining in difficult situations that we cannot righteously change.

⁵⁷ Rev. 12:11.

⁵⁸ Job 1:21.

⁵⁹ Paul goes on in Ephesians 6 to tell us how we do conquer, he says, “put on the full armor of God.” But, of course, Paul isn’t talking about black belts, Kevlar vests, or handguns. No, our armor is to be honest, holy, witnesses for Christ; who are full of faith, confident in our salvation, knowledgeable in the Word of God, regularly talking to the Father, and always alert.

⁶⁰ Thomas A Kempis, *The Imitation of Christ*, trans. Aloysius Kroft, Harry F. Bolton (Milwaukee: Bruce Publishing, 1962), 59.

⁶¹ See: <http://www.ccel.org/fathers2/ANF-03/anf03-54.htm> or

<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/religion/maps/primary/perpetua.html>. Accessed 22 November 2005.

⁶² I am not in the least suggesting that physical battle isn’t sometimes necessary and even a part of the Christian’s duty here. Of course it is.

⁶³ C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, rev. ed. (New York, Macmillan: 1960), 173.

⁶⁴ 1 John 5:4.

⁶⁵ 1 John 4:4.

⁶⁶ Rev. 22:5.

⁶⁷ Dan. 7:18, 27.

⁶⁸ Rev. 3:21. Beale comments: “The ‘overcoming’ occurs before the believer inherits the promises.... And this ‘conquering’ of sin (so 2:4-5, 14-16, 20-24) entails being conquered by the world, since, when believers refuse to compromise with the world, they are persecuted by the world.... Hence, the church that perseveres in its witnessing faith wins a victory on earth even though it suffers earthly defeat.” Beale, *Revelation*, 269. “It is not just how people die that proves them to be overcomers, but the whole of their Christian lives are to be characterized by ‘overcoming,’ which is a process completed at death.” Beale, *Revelation*, 271.

⁶⁹ We sit on Jesus’ throne. And so Revelation 1:6 tells us that He “made us to be a kingdom and priests.” By our identification with Christ’s death and resurrection we inherit with Him. In his commentary on Rev. 1:6, Beale comments: “They not only have been made part of his kingdom and his subjects, but they have also been constituted kings together with him and share his priestly office by virtue of their identification with his death and resurrection.” Beale continues, “Christ has made believers to serve as kings and priests in service to his Father, which is to be for his Father’s eternal glory and dominion. The high point of vv 1-6, and of the whole chapter, is here: the achievement of God’s glory through Christ’s work and the service of his people as kings and priests.” Beale, *Revelation*, 192, 194.

⁷⁰ Beale, *Revelation*, 1116. Rev. 22:5. G. K. Beale comments that it is probable that “the new creation will take some kind of material form and contain creatures to rule over. And even if there are no animals to rule over, it is probable that God’s people will rule over holy angels, since angels were included in the creation over which Adam was to reign.... Christ fulfills the role of the last Adam in order, partly, to rule over, in corporate solidarity with his people, the eternal new creation, which includes the holy angels (Heb. 2:5-16, who exist merely to be servants of the redeemed (Heb. 1:14; cf. Rev. 21:12). But exalted believers are different from the first Adam in that, whereas God only commissioned him to rule, now God *promises* that his people certainly will reign without end.” Beale, *Revelation*, 1116-1117. Osborne wrote regarding Rev. 22:5, “This sums up a major biblical theme on the future reign of the saints. Of course, this cannot be meant literally, for every saint will rule a kingdom that only saints inhabit (there is no hint in Scripture that we will reign over the celestial beings; rather, we are their ‘fellow servants,’ 19:10; 22:9). Thus, it probably means we will participate in the rule of Christ over the eternal kingdom and perhaps “‘exercise sovereignty over the new creation in a way similar to how Adam was to rule ‘over every living thing that moves on the earth’ (Gen. 1:28).” (Beale 1999: 1116).” First, “no hint” is an interesting choice of words since the very word “reign” means to have authority over other creatures. That’s the very denotations of reign or rule. We don’t say we reign (unless we are kidding or crazy) over toasters or microwaves. Second, Adam’s family was charged with ruling over the earth and the Bible tells us that Christians will share the reign of Christ. Adam’s seed were to enjoy the fruits of the earth. Christ’s seed will enjoy the fruits of the cosmos. It would be strange if our authority was actually less than what Adam enjoyed. Third, Jesus says he will give those faithful here “cities” to rule

(even if you take this as a metaphor, the question again still is, “metaphor for what?”). Fourth, I am not sure what Osborne means by “celestial beings” but the passages refer specifically to angels of whom 1 Cor. 6:3 says the saints will judge. But even if we don’t reign over angels (the Scripture isn’t explicit either way) that doesn’t mean there won’t be a host of other creatures over whom we will rule as was the case in Gen. 1:28. The Lord created everything from tigers to toucans on this planet and there is no reason to doubt creations diversity in the life to come. That the Creator would forever restrict himself to only angels and humans seems out of character. Fifth, based on the preceding comments, it seems out of court to say that saints will only rule a kingdom that only saints will inhabit. Is there more than one kingdom? Are the saints getting their own little kingdoms somewhere? Because, if not, then there will probably be a myriad of creatures in the Kingdom. Grant R. Osborne, *Revelation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2002), 776.

⁷¹ Rev. 21:4. Jesus says that the faithful manager who cares for his servants will be put in charge of *all* his master’s possessions. (Luke 12:32. Bock, 1180) In Eph 2:6, “God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus.” O’Brien writes, “Because they [believers] have been identified with Christ in his resurrection and exaltation, they, too, have a position of superiority and authority over evil powers. They no longer live under the authority and coercion of the ‘ruler of the kingdom of the air’ (2:2).” Peter T. O’Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999), 171.

⁷² See also Dan. 7:22: “judgment was given to the saints of the most high.” As for the 1 Cor. passage, Fee writes: “Here he is speaking of the *final judgment* on ‘the world’ as a whole, the entire anti-God system of things that will come under God’s judgment, in which God’s people are in some way to be involved.” Fee, *1 Corinthians*, 233. The angels who sinned await judgment. So 2 Peter 2:4: “For if God did not spare angels when they sinned, but sent them to hell, putting them into gloomy dungeons to be held for judgment.” And Jude 1:6 And the angels who did not keep their positions of authority but abandoned their own home—these he has kept in darkness, bound with everlasting chains for judgment on the great Day.

⁷³ Willard, *Divine Conspiracy*, 398. We shouldn’t be concerned that other humans may have authority over us. As Jesus says in Luke 22:25-27: “Jesus said to them, ‘The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them; and those who exercise authority over them call themselves benefactors. But you are not to be like that. Instead, the greatest among you should be like the youngest, and the one who rules like the one who serves. For who is greater, the one who is at the table or the one who serves? Is it not the one who is at the table? But I am among you as one who serves. You are those who have stood by me in my trials.’” Bock comments regarding this verse: “Luke pictures additional responsibility in the future kingdom era. It is not limited to mere kingdom presence or additional church responsibility, but refers to full participation in the exercise of the kingdom’s authority in the consummation (cf. 1 Cor. 6:2-3).” Bock, *Luke*, vol.2, BECNT (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1994), 77. 1536.

⁷⁴ *The Divine Conspiracy*, 397.

⁷⁵ Christianity is either true or it’s not. If Christianity isn’t true then we should all do something better with our time. But if Christianity is true, and that is exactly my contention, then we really have been forgiven of our sins, adopted into His family, made inheritors of His kingdom and chosen to reign with him for all eternity! Christianity, as Lewis has put it, is either of no importance at all or it is of infinite importance—we must decide which.