

Will Only Faithful Believers Enter the Millennium?

(A Rebuttal of the Kingdom Teaching of

Zane Hodges, Joseph Dillow, & Robert Wilken)

Pastor Kelly Sensenig

The men mentioned above all believe in the literal Millennial Kingdom reign over planet earth. In fact, they espouse premillennialism and are dispensational in their teaching. However, in more recent times, I believe a confusing and errant teaching is being propagated that not all believers will enter the earthly kingdom or theocracy. Some proponents of this view have been Zane Hodges, Joseph Dillow, and Robert Wilken. In general, they have taught that only a certain class of believers will enter the Millennium. They base their findings on various texts found in the parables which deal with the earthly kingdom and also substantiate their findings from some verses found in the epistles, such as Galatians 5:19-21 and 1 Corinthians 6:9-11, which are explained as *Christians* not “inheriting” the kingdom. It’s assumed that not inheriting the kingdom refers to a Christian’s failure to receive an inheritance that relates to reward, reigning privileges, and ultimately entrance into the earthly kingdom.

They also base their conclusions upon the promises given to the overcomers (Rev. 2:24-28; 3:21) in regards to entrance into the Kingdom or Millennium. It’s believed and taught that there are conditional prerequisites (living an overcoming or victorious life) that must be followed if one wants to enter the Millennium. These conclusions are a misrepresentation of what Jesus taught regarding the basis for entrance into the kingdom (John 3:5) and also what the epistles teach, which convey that all believers will return with Christ and reign with Him over the earth (Rev. 5:10; Rev. 19:14; 20:6).

Overcomers and the Millennium

It is being taught by some today within the Free Grace Movement that only a special class of overcoming or victorious believers will actually enter the Millennium. These findings are based upon the letters written to the seven

churches. Revelation 2:25-26 states, “But that which ye have *already* hold fast till I come. And he that overcometh, and keepeth my works unto the end, to him will I give power (authority) over the nations.” Revelation 3:21 adds, “To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne.”

Many assume that the conditional aspect of the promise to rule with Christ during the Millennium actually means that some believers or saints, who have not overcome or lived victorious in this life, will not enter the Millennium and lose the privilege to rule with Christ for 1,000 years. This is a fallacy which clearly denies what the Bible teaches. All saints will enter the earthly theocracy based upon their new birth (John 3:5), because they are “joint-heirs with Christ” (Rom. 8:17), and since Christ gives this promise to all church saints (Rev. 5:10). The future is ours by virtue of our position in Christ and Christ’s promise.

Who then are the overcomers in Revelation chapters 2-3? First, we do know that every saint has already overcome in Christ (1 John 5:5). Every believer is already an overcomer based upon his victorious *position* in Christ.

Second, we also know that every Christian will bear some fruit and transformation because of his regenerate life (John 15:1-4; Eph. 2:10; 1 John 3:6-7, 9; 5:18). Where there is no fruit there is no life (Matt. 7:19-20; 13:22; Jude 1:12). John seems to be consistent with what he previously taught about the overcomers in 1 John and also how all Christians will bear some fruit of transformation in their lives for which they will be rewarded.

In light of these findings, we can conclude that all Christians are overcomers by virtue of their position in Christ and therefore will receive entrance into the Millennium based upon their positional acceptance before God’s throne, which is based upon grace. The overcomers in Revelation 2-3 point to all of God’s saints. They are given all of the promises based upon their position in Christ. At the same time, this *position* must be put into daily *practice* in relation to the many years a believer exists on earth. At one point, John seems to be stressing an overcoming or victorious practice within the lives of these saints (“and keep my works unto the end” – Rev. 2:26). This means

that greater reward and blessing will be given in direct proportion to the faithful living of the overcomers.

Third, we also know that not all believers or saints live a life that is consistent with victory, transformation, and faithfulness to God (1 Cor. 3:3; 2 Thess. 3:14-15; 2 Tim. 4:10; John 12:42; Acts 5:1-11; Heb. 3:12; 4:10-11; 13:5-11; 2 Pet. 2:7; 3:17-18; James 5:19-20; 1 John 5:16). Although all Christians do bear fruit during their earthly lives (John 15:1-3; James 2:17), not all Christians equally overcome and persevere in victory, faithfulness, fruitfulness, and live a consistent, spiritual life up to the end of their days on earth.

Some saints live on a much higher plain than others and sail the heights of victory. They follow Christ faithfully and remain committed to the eternal things that matter most in life (Matt. 6:33), while others fail to possess a consistent pattern of victory throughout their lives in relation to their deeds, doctrines, and deportment of life, and do not maintain a strong level of commitment to Christ's cause (1 Cor. 3:3). The carnal Christian simply has not developed as far as other Christians in the area of sanctification (2 Pet. 1:8-9). Their growth is stunted and they are not progressing in sanctification as other Christians.

Although all saints will enter the Millennium and reign with Christ in some manner or fashion (1 Cor. 6:2; Rev. 5:10; 20:6), based upon their overcoming position in Christ, it's equally true that some overcomers are given the promise of ruling with Christ *to a greater extent and in a greater capacity* during the coming Millennium. This promise is not given as the WAY of their salvation and entrance into the Millennium but to CONFIRM or give PROOF of their salvation and entrance into the Millennium. In other words, the fact that they have overcome in their lives through transformation of living is the outward evidence and verification of their salvation and this reassures them of an *abundant* entrance and reward into the everlasting kingdom (2 Pet. 1:10-11).

The promise of ruling with Christ is also given to provide encouragement to the hearts of these overcoming (victorious) saints when reflecting upon their

reward, recognition, and reigning privileges in the future. Living with more defeat than victory will not yield many spiritual dividends that are related to reward and reigning privileges with Christ during the Millennium. If we are going to be rewarded according to the way that we live for the Lord (2 Cor. 5:10), it is also true that we will reign with Christ according to the way we have lived for Him (Rev. 2:26; 3:21; 2 Tim. 2:12; Matt. 25:21, 23). It's training time for reigning time!

The context of the seven letters suggests that John is admonishing believers to overcome specific trials, tests, and temptations in their daily lives by their faithful obedience and commitment (Rev. 2:4-7, 10-11, 16-17, 24-28; 3:4-5, 10-12, 20-21). Only when believers practice what Christ tells them to do and repent of their wrongdoing (Rev. 2:5, 16; 3:3, 19) can they in a practical way overcome, live victorious, and look forward to extended reward, recognition, and reigning privileges in the Millennium.

Let me reiterate something. All of God's saints will share in reward (1 Cor. 4:5) and possess the future privilege to reign with Christ in some measure (1 Cor. 6:2). However, John is reminding God's people that only those who overcome in relation to their overall Christian living, those who overcome in greater sanctification, those who remain consecrated to God and His cause (Rom. 12:2), those who remain committed to living a righteous and holy life (instead of carnality), those Christians who remain faithful to truth and godliness and possess greater victories than defeats will be greatly rewarded and given greater ruling privileges with Christ during the earthly Millennium.

In summary, all believers will enter the Millennium and reign with Christ (Rev. 5:10) because of their overcoming position in Christ, but they will reign in direct proportion to how they have lived out their lives on earth (Rev. 2:26-27; Matt. 25:21, 23). The faithfulness and victory of the overcomers gives PROOF of their salvation, regeneration, and justification before God (James 2:21-22). Their works and transformation of living confirms the salvation and justification which they already possess through Christ and in Christ alone (Rev. 1:5; James 2:23).

The promises related to Heaven (Rev. 2:7, 17; 3:12), escaping the second death (Rev. 2:11), receiving reward (Rev. 3:4), never having their names erased from the Book of Life (Rev. 3:5), having their names confessed before the Father and angels (Rev. 3:5), and possessing future reigning privileges on earth during the Millennium (Rev. 2:24-28; 3:21) are all based upon their overcoming position in Christ (1 John 5:5). At the same time, the degree of their reward and reigning privileges is based upon the degree of their overcoming, victorious, and faithful living.

Once again, overcoming is not the WAY of salvation but the CONFIRMATION of a salvation already possessed and secured through Christ (Heb. 7:25). *You do not overcome to be saved; you overcome because you are saved.* These victorious and faithful saints (the overcomers) are given these future promises and privileges, not to create legalism in their hearts (salvation through human merit and works), but to encourage their hearts in their present-day struggles, give them incentive to go on in life, and provide them with strength for today and bright hope for the future.

Inheriting the Kingdom

As mentioned in the introduction, some misconstrue the texts that teach *inheriting* the kingdom refers to one's future *entrance* into the Millennium, based upon a believer's earthly commitment and performance within his Christian life. Again, this is a fallacy since all the saints will reign with Christ (1 Cor. 6:2), even though there will be different degrees of reward and reigning privileges (Rev. 2:26; Matt. 25:21, 23) during this future age.

The texts of Galatians 5:19-21 and 1 Corinthians 6:9-11 are not creating a dichotomy or division between two classes of believers (the faithful and unfaithful). These texts do not say that unfaithful Christians "shall not inherit *reward and entrance* in the kingdom of God." This is reading in to the texts something that is simply not there. Paul is actually creating the familiar dichotomy between the saved and the unsaved and it's the unsaved who do not enter the kingdom.

Christ presented a similar analogy in relation to His Second Coming and those who will enter the Millennium. The *sheep* are pictured as believers

while the *goats* are pictured as unbelievers who will be damned forever in everlasting punishment (Matthew 25:31-46). This contrast between the saved and unsaved is also drawn in other “kingdom entrance” contexts where Jesus made a contrast between wicked and faithful servants (Matt. 24:44-51), wise and foolish virgins (Matt. 25:1-13), profitable and unprofitable stewards (Matt. 25:14-30), tares and wheat (Matt. 13:24-31), and different types of marine life which is further explained as the time when Christ will “sever the wicked from among the just” (Matt. 13:47- 50). All of the kingdom passages are designed to teach a dichotomy between the saved and unsaved – not spiritual and unspiritual Christians. Therefore, the familiar dichotomy is once again drawn in Galatians 5:19-21 and 1 Corinthians 6:9-11, where two types of people (saved and unsaved) are being contrasted in view of entrance into the earthly kingdom.

The *kingdom itself* is pictured as an inheritance that all saved people enter by virtue of the new birth (John 3:5) – works have nothing to do with this inheritance or entrance into the kingdom. The earthly kingdom (the 1,000 years) has been prepared as an inheritance before the foundation of the world (Matt. 25:34) but unsaved people do not enter the kingdom (Matt. 25:46). The unsaved (not wicked believers as some teach) are “thrust out” (Luke 13:38) and the door is “shut” (Matt. 25:10) to the earthly kingdom because of their unbelief which is evidenced in their rebellious living (Matt. 24:48-51; 25:26; Gal. 5:21 and 1 Cor. 6:10) but the saved, whose life is evidenced by righteous living, will enter the Millennium (Matt. 13:43).

Rebellious Sinners

Paul uses the pronoun “they” in Galatians 5:21 to separate believers from the nonbelievers (not wicked believers) who practice this type of rebellious lifestyle and who will not enter the earthly theocracy. These passages, among others, refer to unsaved people who “do these things” (Gal. 5:21); “which do iniquity” (Matt.13:41) as a habitual practice and pattern (1 John 3:8-9; 5:18) of rebellion against God.

The Bible Knowledge Commentary on Galatians 5:21 is correct when concluding: “This does not say that a Christian loses his salvation if he lapses

into a sin of the flesh, but that a person who lives continually on such a level of moral corruption gives evidence of not being a child of God.”

Those who habitually practice the “sin list” mentioned in Galatians 5:21 are the same type or group of people who practice the “sin list” of Revelation 21:8: “But the fearful, and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death.” Of course, this is a clear reference to unbelievers being banned from Heaven. In short, those (unbelievers) who habitually practice sin, wickedness, and rebellion against God and His ways are unsaved and will not inherit the kingdom (the earthly theocracy) or Heaven. They will not only be banned from the kingdom (Gal. 5:21; 1 Cor. 6:10) but also from Heaven (Rev. 21:8; 21:27).

Christians or Counterfeits?

Those who promote the alleged teaching that unfaithful Christians will not enter the earthly kingdom invariably misinterpret the teaching of the kingdom parables of Christ. One of these examples is found in Matthew 13. A dichotomy is created between faithful and unfaithful Christians. However, the parables of Matthew 13 clearly reveal a distinction between the saved and lost, believers and nonbelievers, or to relate it to our day, a distinction between Christians and counterfeits. Jesus confirms this throughout the entire context of the Matthew 13 parables by stressing how some people would be “tares” or those who simulate and give the appearance of the true but are actually counterfeit. The tares (counterfeits) are said to be gathered to a place of fiery judgment (Matt. 13:30, 40-42), which elsewhere is presented as an expression of God’s wrath on unbelievers (Matt. 3:12; Mark 9:43-49; 2 Thess. 1:7-9; Rev. 20:15), while the true saints are pictured as entering the earthly kingdom (Matt. 13:43).

Jesus stresses the same division between the saved and lost by using the analogy of a fisherman separated good fish from bad fish, which Christ then identifies as severing the just from the unjust, resulting in the unjust (unsaved) being burned in a furnace of fire (Matt. 13:49-50) – an expression

of God's wrath against the lost. In fact, all of the parables in Matthew 13 are clearly designed to teach a distinction or dichotomy between the true and the false (the saved and unsaved – Christians and counterfeits).

These kingdom parables portray the danger of *false profession among God's true saints*. In Matthew 13 this is explained as a giant tree growing abnormally into something that Satan and his emissaries participate with (parable of the mustard seed – Matt. 13:31-32). This is a picture of the rise of Christendom (a mixture of the true and false throughout this present age). The danger of false profession among God's true saints is also seen when a woman (representing wickedness) corrupts the meal with leaven (Matt. 16:6-12) and it rises into something that is completely leavened, corrupting the truth (the leaven in the meal – Matt. 13:33). In the other parables, Jesus reminds us that even though evil would abound and flourish, the true saints of God would manifest themselves among the false (parables of the treasure and pearl of great price – Matt. 13:44-46).

The parables of Matthew 13 (among other kingdom parables – Matt. 7:13-23 24-25) are always designed to demonstrate the distinction between the true and false, the real and counterfeit, the saved and unsaved, or believers and nonbelievers. This is the intent of Jesus' parabolic teaching, which looks back to what Jesus taught earlier in Matthew 3:12. With scathing and terrifying words Jesus described the judgment upon the unsaved: "Whose fan *is* in his hand, and he will thoroughly purge his floor, and gather his wheat into the garner; but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire."

The "parable of the soils" found earlier in Matthew 13 is designed to make the same distinction among the saved and lost or the true and counterfeit. This is evident because only one of the persons represented in the parable of the soils would actually bear fruit or transformation of living that was genuine and which would continue to manifest itself. The fact that the first person is described as hardened, trampled down soil, pictures Satan's victory in keeping this person's heart hardened and insensitive to the presentation of the truth of salvation (Matt. 13:19).

The second person is said to possess “no root” (Matt. 13:21) which is a clear sign that this person lacked genuine repentance and is therefore a counterfeit. *Where there is no root there can no true fruit* which is the sign of regenerating life (“fruits worthy of repentance” - Luke 3:8). The same is true regarding the third person who is overcome by worldliness and “becometh unfruitful” (Matt. 13:22), bearing no genuine or lasting fruit, which is the sign of spiritual deadness and a lost condition before God (Eph. 2:1-2). This person did not repent of his sins and therefore went back into the same unregenerate lifestyle (2 Pet. 3:19-21) bearing no lasting fruit. This marked him out as a counterfeit and not a genuine believer.

It can be observed that only the last individual, pictured as “good ground,” is said to bear fruit (transformation of living) that was true and lasting. This fruit becomes the evidence of this person’s genuine salvation and regenerate life (“which also beareth fruit, and bringeth forth, some an hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty” - Matt. 13:23). Only one of the four soil types produces lasting fruit which is the sign of regeneration and spiritual life (Eph. 2:10; John 15:1-5) and failure to produce fruit is the tell-tale sign that there is absence of spiritual life (Matt. 7:15-20; John 15:6). In summary, all the parables of Matthew 13 are designed to teach the danger of false profession, the distinction between the true and false, or to update it for our times, they separate true Christians from the counterfeits (1 John 2:19).

Wicked Servants or Wicked Believers?

Those who embrace the teaching that not all believers will enter the earthly kingdom base their findings on the parables and the “wicked servants” that Jesus referenced throughout His kingdom parables. If one is called a “servant” many assume that the individual mentioned must automatically be a believer. This is not the case. When studying the parables, we must remember that there is one primary teaching which is being expressed. We should not become so enamored with details and attempt to relate every detail of a parable to the teachings of the epistles. One thing is certain, God does not identify His own people as being wicked (Matt. 13:49) nor does He compare them to wicked servants anywhere in the Bible.

Where does the Bible actually talk about “wicked believers?” No one has ever showed me this exact terminology (“wicked Christians” or “wicked believers”) in the Bible. The Bible talks about a “wicked and slothful servant” (Matt. 25:26; Luke 19:22), “evil servant” (Matt. 24:48), and “unprofitable servant” (Matt. 25:30) in the parabolic teachings of Christ to make a contrast between the saved and the unsaved – the true and the false. However, I have never found any reference to a wicked and evil believer.

I understand that Christians can be carnal (1 Cor. 3:3) and struggle with the flesh (Rom. 7) but the term “wicked” is assigned to the unsaved who live out their entire life in *total* rebellion against God and abandonment to His purpose and ways (“wicked men: for all men have not faith” - 2 Thess. 3:2). For the believer this type of wickedness is past (Col. 1:21; 2 Pet. 2:7). Only nonbelievers are termed as being wicked and of the “wicked one” (1 John 3:12). The term “wicked” is repeatedly assigned to nonbelievers in the Bible.

In the kingdom passages “wicked servants” are clearly identified as unsaved people for they (themselves) will go into “everlasting punishment” (Matt. 25:46) – not experience everlasting loss of reward or entrance into the Millennial Kingdom! The unsaved in the kingdom contexts are pictured as “tares among the wheat” (Matt. 13:24-30) – not wicked believers among righteous believers. The “tares” and “wicked servants” in these parables are burned in a furnace of fire (Matt. 3:12; 13:30, 42).

The people *themselves* (at the time of entrance into the kingdom) are pictured as being burned and judged – not simply their works. To misconstrue these texts as “wicked believers” whose reward is being lost and who miss entrance into the Millennial in a disciplinary place of “outer darkness” (Matt. 8:12; 22:13; 25:30) is a case of severe eisegesis. The same people who are cast into outer darkness will also experience “everlasting punishment” (Matt. 25:46) which in Biblical terminology always refers to an expression of God’s wrath upon the unsaved (“in flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God ... Who shall be punished with everlasting destruction” - 2 Thess. 1:8-9; see also Mark 9:43-45; Luke 16:19-31; Rev. 20:15).

Fire, Kingdom & Temporal Punishment

The “fire” in the kingdom contexts always refers to God’s wrath being directed against unbelievers – not a group of alleged “wicked believers” who have failed to follow Christ properly. Since when does “hell” (hades) or hell fire have anything to do with wicked or unfaithful believers who are being spanked by God! *Believers are spanked and disciplined in this life (Heb. 12:6) – not the next life.* The fire, outer darkness, and the wailing and gnashing of teeth are linked together in the kingdom contexts, which point to nonbelievers experiencing God’s wrath in “everlasting punishment” (Matt. 25:46) – not some kind of temporal punishment and banishment from the Millennium that only lasts for 1,000 years.

The expressions of a fire that “never shall be quenched” (Mark 9:43, 45), along with the smoke, darkness, and a fiery furnace (Matt. 13:50) in the teachings of Jesus are some of the clearest expressions of God’s wrath found in the entire Bible, which would also include the teachings passed on by Jesus (Rev. 1:1) to John. The teachings of “fire” found in the Book of Revelation also speak of unsaved people experiencing God’s wrath under His judgment. Revelations 14:10: “The same shall drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is poured out without mixture into the cup of his indignation; and he shall be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels, and in the presence of the Lamb.” Revelation 20:15, “And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire.”

How can being “tormented with fire and brimstone” with “the smoke of their torment” ascending “up for ever and ever” and people being cast into an eternal “lake of fire” (Rev. 20:15) have anything to do with loss of reward or loss of privilege to enter the Millennial Kingdom? And yet, many will equate the “fire” found in the teachings of Jesus to some kind of purgatory or disciplinary fire that believers (God’s people) experience in the future for their failure to follow Jesus and become His disciple. The “fire” and eternal judgment in the Gospel accounts and epistles give a united testimony of God’s wrath being meted out on unbelievers.

Reinventing Terms

To claim that God's saints will in some disciplinary way be cast into outer darkness, experience eternal and unquenchable fire (in a metaphorical sense), and be banished from God's presence (during the Millennial Kingdom) is actually a travesty of the truth. It overturns the clear understanding and meaning of descriptive terms which are always used for the unsaved (wicked, wicked servants, unbelieving – Matt. 13:49, 25:26; 19:22; 1 Cor. 7:14; Titus 1:15; Rev. 21:8) and reinvents the expression of God's wrath as something that can be brought against believers. One can be assured that escaping "the damnation of hell" (Matt. 23:33) is not escaping some kind of imaginary, temporal form of judgment that exists outside the earthly kingdom, which is assigned to uncommitted believers, who have not followed Christ in this life.

If this were case, how much lack of commitment does it take to miss out on the kingdom blessings? What degree of unfaithfulness does it take to miss the Millennium? Is it 20, 50, or 70%? Who could ever know? The Bible is very clear on this matter; all saints will rule with Christ in the Millennium, since every believer in Heaven anticipates this future time of ruling by exclaiming: "And hast made us unto our God kings and priests: and we shall reign on (over) the earth" (Rev. 5:10). Revelation 19:11-16 pictures all the saints returning with the King to rule and reign with Him on earth.

We can be sure that the saints which have been enjoying the glories of Heaven for hundreds of years are not going to be bottled up in some place of "outer darkness" and miss sharing in the Millennial Kingdom, as some teach today. This is preposterous! We are all entering the earthly kingdom since it is our inheritance by spiritual birth. "Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God" (John 3:5). The glorious truth is that all of God's saints will enter the earthly theocracy because they have been born again - not because they have excelled in their Christian life, or have gained enough reward to enter. Nothing could be further from the truth.

Reassurance

Wickedness, godlessness, and eternal punishment and banishment from Jesus Christ, in the next life, are always associated with unbelievers (Rev. 20:11-15; 21:8). Thank God this is not the case for His beloved saints (2 Cor. 5:8; Phil. 1:21; Rom. 8:1). To think that all believers will enter the Father's House (John 14:1-3) but not the Father's kingdom (Matt. 25:34) is a theological contradiction and absurdity, since both are entered on the basis of grace and the new birth (John 3:5; John 14:6).

Let us rest and be reassured that Scripture repeatedly says that God's wrath is being revealed against unbelievers in some measure today (Rom. 1:18) and it will also be meted out upon wicked unbelievers in the future. Believers are not subject to God's condemnation and wrath today (John 3:18) nor in the future (1 Thess. 5:9). Praise God for this reassuring truth!