

BEING OVERCOMERS WITH A VISION, NOT IDEALISTS WITH A DREAM

As the Lord's lovers who seek to practice the church life according the way revealed by God in the New Testament, we should be people of vision, not idealists. The apostle Paul was such a person, a person who was captured by the heavenly vision of the transcendent God-man, the Lord Jesus Christ, and of the church, the Body of Christ, the great corporate "Me" (Acts 9:4). Paul was faithful to the end in spite of many problems among the churches, including internal strifes, deviations from the truth of the gospel, and even rejection of his ministry (1 Cor. 1:10; Gal. 5:7; 2 Tim. 1:15). As he faced examination as a prisoner, Paul could tell Agrippa, "I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision" (Acts 26:19). At the end of his ministry he could testify to Timothy, "I have fought the good fight; I have finished the course; I have kept the faith" (2 Tim. 4:7). Today the Lord is seeking the same kind of people—overcomers who stand steadfastly to carry out God's economy in the midst of trying circumstances. Brother Ron Kangas has spoken many times on the difference between vision and idealism, even applying this distinction in speaking of the most disorderly church addressed in Paul's Epistles:

Related to the church, there is a difference between a visionary and an idealist. An idealist has an ideal of what the church is supposed to be, and when they first come into the church life, they think they have found utopia. But gradually they discover that the church with all the saints is not a perfect place. A visionary, however, is governed by the divine revelation concerning the reality of the church and lives in the practicality of the church with all of its problems under this governing vision. This is how Paul could write a letter and address it to the "church of God which is in Corinth" (1 Cor. 1:2). Despite there being sects, some being drunk at the love feasts, some suing other saints, and there being chaos concerning the gifts in the church in Corinth, Paul regarded it as the church of God in Corinth. Paul was very clear about the condition of the church, but he also wanted us to be clear that it was nevertheless the church of God in Corinth. (Ron Kangas, "The Mending Ministry of Life," *The Ministry of the Word* 18:2 (February 2014), 26)

Idealists will never be satisfied with the practical church life and will inevitably become disillusioned and critical when problems arise. A person of vision realizes that God allows chaotic situations, grievous as they may be, to mature and perfect His saints to produce them as overcomers through whom He can deal with His enemy and bring in His kingdom.

The Vision That We Need

To be preserved and overcome in the midst of chaos, we need to see a particular vision—the vision of God's New Testament economy (1 Tim. 1:4; Eph. 3:9). This vision has both an objective aspect and a subjective aspect. According to this vision our God has an eternal purpose, which He accomplishes through the church, the Body of Christ (Eph. 3:10-11). His creation of the universe, His making of man, and His incarnation, human living, death, resurrection, and ascension are all for this purpose (See *The Governing and Controlling Vision of the Bible*, chapters 1 and 2).

Subjectively, we must see that the Spirit, who is the realization of Christ as the embodiment of God in humanity, now indwells us (Rom. 8:9, 11; 1 Cor. 3:16). This Spirit is the means by which all that God is and has done and all that Christ is and has accomplished are made real to us and by which all the unsearchable riches of such a Christ are transmitted into us (John 15:26; 16:13; Eph. 3:8). The church as the Body of Christ is built up by the growth in the divine life and the mutual supplying by all the members (Col. 2:19; Eph. 4:15-16).

We also need a clear vision of Christ's all-sufficiency. If we see the transcendence of the incarnated, crucified, resurrected, and ascended God-man, Jesus Christ, we will realize that no matter what outward circumstances we find ourselves in, He is able to save us to the uttermost by the power of His indestructible life (Heb. 7:25, 16). In the midst of a great degradation, including the rejection of his ministry by "all who are in Asia" (2 Tim. 1:15), this seeing enabled the apostle Paul to say, "For which cause also I suffer these things; but I am not ashamed, for I know whom I have believed, and I am persuaded that He is able to guard my deposit unto that day" (v. 12). The vision of God as the all-sufficient One (Num. 24:4) compelled even the Gentile prophet Balaam to utter only blessings concerning Israel (vv. 9-10) because he had been brought into the divine view concerning God's people, which was not according to their actual condition in themselves but according to God's ability to carry out His purpose in them. Today our God is working to accomplish His heart's desire to have many sons conformed to the image of His firstborn Son (Rom. 8:29).

We need to see that He is fully able to carry this out through the operation of the power of His resurrection life no matter how the outward circumstances may appear (Eph. 1:19-23; 3:20; Phil. 2:13).

The Importance of Vision

At the end of his Epistle to the Romans, Paul praised God, saying, “Now to Him who is able to establish you according to my gospel, that is, the proclamation of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery” (Rom. 16:25a). This mystery is God’s economy concerning Christ and the church. When the mystery unveiled by God becomes our vision, it establishes us in our Christian life. Moreover, it directs and controls our living and service and preserves us in the midst of degradation. Brother Witness Lee testified, “In my path of over fifty years in the Christian life, I have passed through many things. I am grateful for God’s mercy that His grace has kept me in His presence. But I can testify of one thing that preserves me all the time—a clear vision. A clear vision is the real preserving power” (*The Two Great Mysteries in God’s Economy*, 42).

Vision is more than knowing something objectively. It is seeing a divine scenery through accumulated revelation in spirit (Eph. 1:17-23; 3:3-6). God’s revelation is recorded in the Bible, but this revelation must become ours subjectively by our seeing the intrinsic significance of the written words in the Bible through the exercise of our spirit in prayer (6:18). As we seek the Lord in His Word with the help of those who have gone before us to open up the Bible, our seeing gradually broadens and deepens until we see a panoramic view of God’s economy and of the all-inclusiveness and all-sufficiency of Christ. The vision we see, along with God’s operation in us and in our environment, will not only make us stable in our Christian life but also be a source of strength for others in times of trial (1 Pet. 5:10; 1 Cor. 15:58). Though we may desire to “lead a quiet and tranquil life in all godliness and gravity” (1 Tim. 2:2), we should not be stumbled by chaos in our environment or in the church but continue as the Lord’s faithful ones to abide in Him, in His Word, and in His love (Rom. 8:35-39). This will enable us to overcome in chaos and to become a channel through whom He can supply life to others in the church.

Becoming Overcomers to Triumph in God’s Economy in the Midst of Chaos

Overcomers do not fear and are not defeated by chaos; rather, they conquer chaos by cooperating with God to carry out His constructive divine economy (see *The Satanic Chaos in the Old Creation and the Divine Economy in the New Creation*). This is borne out in the New Testament Epistles and Revelation:

Consider the churches in Corinth, Thessalonica, Philippi, or of Galatia. What you see is chaos, and there will always be chaos. God’s economy, especially as it is revealed in 1 and 2 Timothy and Titus, is a matter of conquering chaos. Overcomers conquer chaos. They are not defeated by chaos; rather, they pass through all manner of negative things and triumph in God’s economy. (Ron Kangas, “God’s Economy in Faith versus Different Teachings,” *The Ministry of the Word* 9:1 (January 2005), 21)

In Revelation 2 and 3 the Lord called for overcomers in all seven churches, including churches that were in great degradation. To overcome in the midst of the churches’ degradation was not to forsake those churches because they were less than ideal but to triumph in them despite their condition. Today to overcome is to fully cooperate with the Lord to accomplish the constructive divine economy in the midst of the destructive satanic chaos that surrounds us, a chaos that is under the usurping authority of “the world-rulers of this darkness” (Eph. 6:12).

The rapture of the man-child in Revelation 12 leads to Satan being cast down to the earth and the declaration, “Now has come the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of His Christ” (v. 10). The man-child is composed of those who “overcame him [Satan] because of the blood of the Lamb and because of the word of their testimony, and they loved not their soul-life even unto death” (v. 11). They did not flee chaos but rather overcame it by being empowered in the Lord and in the might of His strength (Eph. 6:10; 1:19-22; Col. 1:11; 2 Tim. 4:17). Ultimately, it is the overcoming saints who will follow the Lord Jesus to destroy His enemies at Armageddon (Rev. 19:11-21). If we have no experience in war, if we do not participate in the church as the corporate warrior today (Eph. 6:11-18), fighting for God’s interest in the midst of this darkness, how can we be prepared to fight for the Lord against the forces of darkness in that day? May we all aspire and pursue to be such people, not chasing a vain fantasy of an ideal church life but seeking to overcome in the practical church life that the Lord has ordained.