

1 John 5:1-5

Overcoming The World

After many months of our study together of John's first letter, we are drawing toward the end. And we need to remember that the great theme of the letter is to inform us and remind us that as Christians we have fellowship with God and His Son, Jesus Christ. This means that we share in the life of God. We are born of God. A new birth has taken place in us and the very life of God is now a part of who we are.

We also share in the victory of Christ. He overcame the temptations of this world that pull us away from God.¹ And through the power of God, he overcame the great enemy of death.² Jesus Christ now lives forever as a glorified human being. And through Christ we too will share in everlasting life and glory in the age to come.³ The apostle John wants us to know these things and to be assured of them so that our joy may be full.

Therefore, the apostle gives us three ways to maintain our fellowship and our joy. We are to obey God's commandments and practice living in righteousness.⁴ We are to love one another in both word and deed.⁵ And we are to believe, preserve and proclaim the truth about the person and work of Jesus Christ.⁶ As we begin chapter 5, John brings together all three of these signs of authentic Christianity. And he begins with Christ and our new life in him.

Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God, and everyone who loves Him who begot also loves him who is begotten of Him.
(1 John 5:1)

What makes someone a Christian? It is not being a part of a church, though you should. It is not being good and kind, although that should be a result. You are a Christian because you believed God concerning His Son, Jesus Christ. You believe that Jesus died to take away our sins. And you believe that God raised the man, Jesus Christ up from the dead. And the very moment that

¹ Matthew 4:1-11; Hebrews 4:14-16

² Acts 2:31, 32

³ Philippians 3:20, 21

⁴ 1 John 1:6, 7

⁵ 1 John 3:18

⁶ 1 John 4:2, 3

you believe this truth a wonderful miracle takes place within you. You are born of God.

That little preposition “of” is very important. The Greek word is ek and it means out from the very center of something. If I were to draw a diagram of what ek means I would draw two circles; a big circle representing God and smaller circle representing you. I would then place a dot in the middle of the big circle. Then I would draw a line from that dot all the way outside the big circle, God, and into you. What was in God is now in you!

To be born of God is to receive within you the very life of God. This is astounding! When God created the universe, the vast galaxies and stars and planets, He did not impart Himself to it. But in our salvation, in the new birth, the very nature of God is born within us. The apostle Peter proclaims that we are now “partakers of the divine nature.”⁷

Being born of God we are entirely unlike what we were before. The apostle Paul calls us a “new creation.”⁸ Life can now take on a new quality of existence. And the essence of that new quality is love.

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Being born of God means that He is our Father and we are all in the family of God. And if we truly love our Father who has given us new life, we will also love our brothers and sisters in the family of God. Here is something wonderful: we are not only born again to love others, we are brought into the family of God to be loved. Psalm 68:6 says “God sets the solitary in families.” Sometimes you can feel all alone out in the world. But we are now a part of the family of God.

It is here in the family of God where we should feel the most accepted, the most cherished; the most cared for and loved. And this love of God should fill our homes and our families and finally reach out to the world where people long to be loved. But now, let me say this too. Love is not always just flowers and sweetness. Sometimes love must do the unpleasant thing. Sometimes confronting a person is the most loving thing to do, even though it may make that person upset or angry.

⁷ 2 Peter 1:4

⁸ 2 Corinthians 5:17

A very rich man once came to Jesus and asked how to gain everlasting life. Jesus Christ answered and said, "You know the commandments." The man responded that he had kept the commandments. But Jesus exposed the real desire of the man's heart. So he said,

Go your way, sell whatever you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, take up the cross, and follow Me.

Scripture says that Jesus said this because he loved the man. But the man loved his riches more than God and walked away sorrowful and upset.⁹ We don't really love someone until we love them enough to tell them the truth.

Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God, and everyone who loves Him who begot also loves him who is begotten of Him. ² By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and keep His commandments. ³ For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments. And His commandments are not burdensome.
(1 John 5:1-3)

Here is how we truly know if we love one another; if we love God and keep His commandments. Faith, love and obedience are inextricably linked together. Our love to God and our love toward others are the commandments of God. There are other New Testament commandments. We are to put off anger and wrath and we are to be forgiving.¹⁰ We are to live in holiness and righteousness.¹¹ We are to rejoice always and pray without ceasing.¹² But John's concern here is love in both word and deed.

And our obedience must be more than mere external obedience; our obedience must come from the heart that doesn't find the will of God burdensome. To the unbeliever God's commandments seem heavy, like a ball and chain around their feet. They would gladly be set free from God's commands. But to us they are not a terrible burden and duty, but a joy. What you desire to do with your whole heart is not burdensome to do.

In Psalm 40:8 David sang, "I delight to do Your will, O my God, And Your law is within my heart." In Psalm 119:35, the psalmist sang, "Make me walk in the

⁹ Matthew 19:16-26; Mark 10:17-22

¹⁰ Colossians 3:12ff

¹¹ 1 Peter 1:15, 16

¹² 1 Thessalonians 4:16, 17

path of Your commandments, For I delight in it." And then in verse 92 he sang this remarkable thought, "Unless Your law *had* been my delight, I would then have perished in my affliction." Keeping God's law with delight brought the psalmist through a very difficult time.

Loving God means admiring and valuing and treasuring and desiring God's will. It is a delight to do God's will. His commandments are not burdensome. Why are they not burdensome and heavy? The answer is in verse 4.

For whatever is born of God overcomes the world.
And this is the victory that has overcome the world
—our faith.
(1 John 5:4)

Notice the word "For" at the beginning of the verse. This preposition explains why loving God and keeping His commandments is not burdensome to the believers. First, we are born of God. We are able to love God and love others and keep God's commandments, because our new nature is strong to stand against the temptations of the world. When God promised the new covenant in Ezekiel, He said, "I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will keep My judgments and do *them*."¹³ That's the first punch. The second punch, the knockout blow against the world is our faith.

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Consider what we are up against in the world. Think of the moral pressures we face in the world today. Think of the ideals and attitudes and standards of the godless society that surrounds us. There is tremendous pressure trying to make us conform to a world where God has no place.¹⁴ We overcome it all by the Spirit of God within us and by faith. Faith takes God at His Word¹⁵ and sees the things of God as greater treasure than all the things of the world. Let me show you the power of faith.

By faith Noah, being divinely warned of things not yet seen, moved with godly fear, prepared an ark for the saving of his household, by which he

¹³ Ezekiel 36:27

¹⁴ Romans 12:1, 2

¹⁵ Romans 10:17

condemned the world and became heir of the righteousness which is according to faith.
(Hebrews 11:7)

The world had never seen rain, much less a great flood at this time. Think of the societal pressures against Noah. How he must have been scorned and ridiculed. But Noah took God at His Word and by faith built an ark and saved his family.

By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to the place which he would receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going.
(Hebrews 11:8)

Again, think of all the insecurities of moving from your home to a foreign land. But God had promised to make Abraham a great nation when he had no children. And Abraham believed God.

By faith Sarah herself also received strength to conceive seed, and she bore a child when she was past the age, because she judged Him faithful who had promised. ¹²Therefore from one man, and him as good as dead, were born as many as the stars of the sky in multitude—innumerable as the sand which is by the seashore.
(Hebrews 11:11, 12)

Abraham and Sarah believed God and had a child when it was all but impossible. Romans 4 tells us that Abraham “glory to God...being fully convinced that what He had promised He was also able to perform.”¹⁶ And Sarah “judged Him faithful who had promised.”¹⁷

By faith Moses, when he became of age, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter,
²⁵ choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin,
²⁶ esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt; for he looked to the reward.
²⁷ By faith he forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the

¹⁶ Romans 8:20, 21

¹⁷ Hebrews 11:11

king; for he endured as seeing Him who is invisible.
(Hebrews 11:24-27)

Moses overcame Pharaoh and all of Egypt's power and treasure by setting his heart on the reward from God. We do not overcome the world by straining and fighting against it. We overcome the world by our faith in something and someone greater. It is not the quality of your faith that matters, it is the object of your faith.

Who is he who overcomes the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?
(1 John 5:5)

If we believe that Jesus is the Son of God we are born of God. And we are united to Jesus Christ and we share in his victory. In Christ we have an indestructible hope of everlasting life, glory and victory in the coming kingdom of God. Why would I cave in to the seductions of the world? Why would I allow myself to be deceived into buying into all that is passing away?

Think of our final victory in Christ and think of it often. And believe in Jesus Christ and all that you have in him. John 1:16 declares that "of His fullness we have all received, and grace for grace." Philippians 4:13 proclaims "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me." Let's read the Word of God in Colossians 2.

As you therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord,
so walk in Him, ⁷rooted and built up in Him and
established in the faith, as you have been taught,
abounding in it with thanksgiving.

⁸Beware lest anyone cheat you through philosophy
and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men,
according to the basic principles of the world, and not
according to Christ. ⁹For in Him dwells all the fullness of
the Godhead bodily; ¹⁰and you are complete in Him,
who is the head of all principality and power.
(Colossians 2:6-10)

When you place your faith and trust in Jesus Christ his victory over the world becomes your victory. In Jesus Christ you are redeemed and sanctified and destined for life and glory in the kingdom of God. By faith Jesus Christ is your strength and wisdom and your ability to love God, to keep His Word, to love others and to overcome the world. An old song says,

Turn your eyes upon Jesus...and the things of earth
will grow strangely dim in the light of his glory and grace.

Praise God!