

November 12, 2017  
Sunday Evening Service  
Series: 1 John  
Community Baptist Church  
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*To Ponder . . .*

Questions to ponder as you prepare to hear from 1 John 5:1-5.

1. What does it mean to believe in Jesus?
2. How can you possibly love all other Christians?
3. How does obedience to God indicate we love Him?
4. Do God's commands seem burdensome to you? Why are they not?
5. What does victory over the world look like and feel like?

### **FAITH IS THE VICTORY** **1 John 5:1-5**

Maybe when you were born again and miraculously ushered into the family of God, a well-meaning saint encouraged you to read 1 John. Why would we do that to new Christians? This little letter is actually quite profound and sometimes difficult to understand. Yes, but a cursory reading across the surface of the letter reveals that throughout the letter John has established multiple tests that prove if a person is indeed born again.

Up to this point in the letter, we have come across three tests that John presents to answer the question: "Am I truly born again?" In fact, John has presented each of these three tests twice. Test one proves that we are born again by living in obedience to Christ (2:3-6; 3:4-10). Test two proves we are born again if we are loving fellow

Christians (2:7-11; 3:11-18). The third test proves we are born again because we have genuine faith in truth or right doctrine (2:18-27; 4:1-6).

Now, in the text before us, John draws all of those tests together to teach that the genuineness of the new birth is revealed in obedience to God's Word, love for other Christians, and a right view of Christ. The result of a lifestyle characterized by these three traits is that we will have victory over the world.

Oh, is there a conflict with the world? Take a moment to remember John's blunt challenge in 2:15 where he told us to "stop loving the world." Serious consideration of that challenge might well cause us to ask, "How can I do that?" John would answer, "Just be what you are." You are a forgiven and cleansed sinner, a child of God, indwelt by God the Holy Spirit. Live like it. When we fail to be what we are, we will fail to do the will of God. The will of God for all of His children is to enjoy victory over a system of thought and activity that opposes God.

It doesn't take a theologian to discover that the world is opposed to God in almost every way imaginable. The world is the arena of sin. God's children are not characterized by sinning. Therefore, we must have victory. And those who have a taste of victorious Christian living find that it is sweet indeed.

### **We Know We Have Been Born Again Because We Believe Jesus (vv.1-3).**

Through John the apostle, God taught us that born again people believe and love. More specifically, people who believe that Jesus is the Christ are born again. In fact, *Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been born of God (v.1a)*. Quite obvious is the fact that the affirmation is addressed to everyone who believes.

On one hand, the term "everyone" appears to be universal, all inclusive. There are people who believe that everyone will ultimately be saved from hell. There are others who claim that because we all have a divine spark that tends toward goodness residing within, that everything will turn out alright for everyone. All of those people ignore the qualification John attached to everyone.

We could just as easily say (as John did in v.5) that ONLY those who believe that Jesus is the Christ are born again. Belief is the discriminating point. Belief is the Biblical matter of faith. Faith is full, complete dependence. It is life changing in every way. Faith is the gift of God that gives life to spiritually dead people. Saving faith therefore must be fixed on the only acceptable object.

The object of this genuine faith is Jesus who is the Christ. Faith is not a matter of being intellectually convinced that the man Jesus actually existed. Most false religions acknowledge that much. Rather, true faith that leads to the new birth embraces the fact that Jesus, the man from Nazareth, was the Christ. To acknowledge that Jesus is the Christ is tantamount to acknowledging that He is God. This faith depends wholly on the fact that Jesus of Nazareth was God in the flesh, the member of the Trinity who came to earth to become human in order to redeem humans from sin's penalty through His sacrifice of Himself on the cross.

We must make no mistake about this non-negotiable truth. Faith that is wholly fixed on the truth about Jesus is the essential trait of the new birth. No one can be born again without embracing this truth about Jesus. More important, the text declares that everyone who is characterized by this kind of believing has already in the past been born again.

We who believe have at some point in the past experienced the miracle of regeneration. The real us, the soul that lives for eternity, was recreated spiritually much like our original birth by physical means. This idea of conception, reception of life, resulting in new life is a miracle to say the least.

More and more surveys and statistics are indicating a serious decline in church attendance, identification with Christianity, and claims of being born again. This does not concern me because I see it as a necessary and natural correction. It is my opinion that for a couple of generations, Americans have been making religious claims that are not genuine but are simply the afterglow of God's genuine work in past generations. Knowing the characteristics of God's children, having a grasp of right biblical lingo, being familiar with acceptable traditions of Christianity is not at all the same as being miraculously born into God's family.

Furthermore, truly born again people love the Father and other born again people. *And everyone who loves the Father loves whoever has been born of him (v.1b)*. Again John addressed everyone. There are no exceptions to the rule. Whatever John says here applies to every single member of God's family. The rule applies to every single person who loves the Father. Everyone who loves the Father, loves fellow Christians.

The word for love is that special New Testament word, that Christian love, the kind of love God has shown us (*agpao*). Here is the universal truth for all members of God's family. If you really love God, you also love everyone who also has been begotten by the Father. If God has given spiritual birth to us, we will desire the very best, and work toward the very best, for other people to whom God has given spiritual birth. The tough reality is that some of these people are like us—rather unlovely or unlikeable.

These principles are specific and precise. There is no variation or shadow of turning. It leaves us with this conclusion: Either we have experienced the miracle of regeneration or we have not. How we love (or even if we love) proves that we are either in or out. People who have not experienced the miracle of the new birth are left to pretend.

So what does that miracle look like as it works out in life? Some professing Christians, maybe many professing Christians, pretend all their lives and might not even be aware they are pretending. Again, they are well aware of the acceptable standards, and for the most part they do them. But on this test of loving other Christians, they fail miserably. Maybe you have seen this scenario. A child is in her father's arms hugging his neck. Her brother is on the floor behind the father's back. And while Sweet Susy is hugging Daddy she is also sticking out her tongue at her brother. Do you stick out your spiritual tongue at Christians who are not like you?

If we are concluding at this point that maybe love is pretty important, we are concluding accurately. Maybe that conclusion should cause us to ask, "How do I know if I love?" John answered, "We know we love each other if we are obeying God." *By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and obey his commandments (v.2)*.

We know that we are loving fellow siblings in the family of God when we love God and keep His commandments. It is interesting that John would use subjunctive verbs for *love God* and for *obey commandments*. In the Greek language, the subjunctive mood expresses possibility or even probability, but not reality. Therefore, the principle here is that we have full assurance (are knowing) that we are loving God's children, if indeed we are actually loving God and actually obeying His commandments. If we are not loving God and keeping His commandments, we have no assurance that we actually do love His children. If we do not love God's children, we do not have assurance we are born again.

How incredibly important it is for us to remain in a condition of loving God and obeying His commands! In the next verse, we will see the unbreakable connection between love for God and obedience to God. But even in this there is a danger. What if a person is confused about the difference between human preferences and human commands versus God's commandments? Such a person could be very zealous to obey human rules and think that they are loving others and obeying God as they should, when in reality they are failing the test. That means that a person could spend his entire life keeping manmade rules, thinking that is proof of regeneration, and not even be born again and go to hell.

We must be able to distinguish between preferences that we like to keep and God's commands that we must obey. It is okay for us to have preferences, but we must not let them be a substitute for God's truth. We will know God's commands only if we are familiar with them. We will be familiar with them only if we read the Bible. Again we come to this very important but simple challenge: Read your Bible, know your Bible, love your Bible.

That is a critical practice in the Christian's life because keeping God's commands is love for God. *For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments. And his commandments are not burdensome* (v.3). It is as Jesus taught: *"If you love me, you will keep my commandments"* (John 14:15). He continued that thought: *"Whoever has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me. And he who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and manifest myself to him"* (John 14:21). He also taught, *"If you keep*

*my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love"* (John 15:10).

There is no exception to this rule. A desire and zeal to keep God's commands is the most obvious proof we love Him. And we love Him only because He loves us first and pours out His love into our hearts. And God's commands are not burdensome compared to the burdens of manmade laws. Jesus taught that the commands of the Pharisees were burdensome (Matthew 23:4; Luke 11:46). But God's commands are not burdensome because of God's love for us and our love for Him. This is like asking if it is a horrible burden for you to give your kidney to your child who needs one. I don't know many parents who would even flinch at such a request. Of course we would make that sacrifice because we love our children.

God's commands are not burdensome because God has given us life and power through the indwelling Holy Spirit. Jesus gave the invitation, *"Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light"* (Matthew 11:28-30).

It is true that the Lord's commands are difficult because they mitigate against everything that is natural about us. But the Lord's commands are not burdensome (they are not like a heavy weight weighing us down). If you are struggling with a command of the Lord and it is becoming a weight, do as God commanded through Peter: *Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you, casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you* (1 Peter 5:6-7).

### **We Know We Have Been Born Again Because We Overcome the World (vv.4-5).**

The great truth is that faith overcomes the world. In this simple statement God promised victory for His people. *Everyone who has been born of God overcomes the world* (v.4a). Again we see the word *everyone* and are reminded that in this matter also there are no exceptions, no special cases. Literally the promise reads: *Everyone having been born of God is conquering the world*. We have already considered what it means to be born again. But this guarantee that we

will overcome the world might prompt us to ask a question: “What is the world?”

In this letter John gave us this description of the world: *Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world – the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride in possessions – is not from the Father but is from the world. And the world is passing away along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever (1 John 2:15-17)*. We see in these verses that the world (in this case) is the desires of the flesh (passions) the desires of the eye (covetousness) and pride.

All of that is attitude and action in conflict with God our Creator. Therefore, all of that is sin, which means in short that the world is sin. That sin principle is always there in the form of temptation to abandon God’s Word, God’s way. The problem is pictured like Satan as a roaring lion seeking someone to destroy. The world is like Satan the accuser of the brethren. It is like sin crouching at the door desiring to master us.

God commands us to fight with that sin principle. *For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places (Ephesians 6:12)*. The world is a formidable enemy that should not be taken lightly. Take it lightly and you will not be victorious. You will be a victim.

The first serious confrontation in the War Between the States was at Fort Sumter in the Charleston Harbor. The bombing of the fort was the declaration of war and opened the conflict that shaped our nation. However, the first major battle was at Manassas Junction, located about 32 miles west of Washington, D.C. Because President Lincoln’s Secretary of State William Seward predicted that the war would be brief against the southern rebels, the battle was shaping up to be a public spectacle. Many of the elite and members of the upper crust of society decided to don their best party attire, mount their carriages, and travel out to watch the mighty Army of the Potomac whip the miscreants. Like so many tailgaters at a football game, they showed up to cheer on their boys who were dressed sharply in the new blue uniforms. Boy were they surprised when that ragtag band

of misfits ran their boys off the field of battle in a sound defeat. Those fans scattered like chickens when the fox gets in the chicken coop!

Too many professing Christians have the same errant and deadly view of sin. They believe they can think sinful thoughts, hang out with sinful people, entertain sinful media and walk away unscathed. They learn too late that no one can. We need to conquer.

So what does conquering look like? First, it is the practice of identifying the enemy. Paul understood this need. He confessed, *But I see in my members another law waging war against the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members (Romans 7:23)*. Second, conquering is the practice of bringing that identified enemy into subjection. *We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ (2 Corinthians 10:5)*. Most of the conflict with the world will be fought and won or lost in the brain. You are what you think. Get control of your mind.

So then, how can we overcome the world? John answered, *And this is the victory that has overcome the world – our faith (v.4b)*. The Greek text sounds like this: *Faith is the conquest that overcame the world*. This is not a reference to a nebulous concept of faith but refers to *the faith of us*.

God has already put into effect the plan that our faith overcomes the world. The plan is already working. We put it into practice today, tomorrow. God has already defeated sin and Satan at the cross. But sin and Satan are still active. We have already been born again, given life and victory is certain. But the battle still rages and we still need to conquer. It is not just a daily battle but a moment by moment battle.

How do we conquer? Faith rooted in Christ is the way to victory. *Who is it that overcomes the world except the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God? (v.5)*. Those who have faith in Christ are victorious. Active, ongoing faith in Christ is essential if we would have any victory over the sin of the world. Just as it is impossible to love as we should without being obedient to Christ, so it is impossible to love or be obedient if we don’t trust Christ. And if we are not loving Christ and being obedient to Christ, we have no hope whatsoever of having victory. Does your faith in Christ impact your thoughts and actions?

Only those who trust Christ have victory. The one who is conquering is the one who is trusting Christ. Therefore, the statement is written to reflect the reality that “present tense trusting results in present tense conquering.” It is too easy to think of our faith as an event in the past. It is true that we are saved by faith. It is also true that the righteous continue to live by faith. Am I daily trusting Jesus to be who the Bible says He is?

Also, a necessary aspect of faith throughout the New Testament is “faithfulness.” That idea comes into play as we conquer the world. If we really trust Christ, we will be faithful to Him. If we are not faithful to Christ, it is because we do not trust Him. Where faithfulness is wanting, so will victory over the world be wanting.

This principle of faith being demonstrated in faithfulness is the theme running through all the letters Jesus had John write to the seven churches in Asia. To the Church in Ephesus Jesus said, “Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent, and do the works you did at first” (Rev. 2:5). To the Church in Smyrna Jesus said, “Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life” (2:10). To the Church in Pergamum Jesus said, “Therefore repent. If not, I will come to you soon and war against them with the sword of my mouth” (2:16). And the theme of faithful obedience continues throughout the seven letters. The sad reality is that history shows how all of the churches failed to be faithful and all of them were taken over by the world.

We are in a vicious war. In these days it really does appear that the Church is losing the battle. The visible church, the local churches, those organizations made up of saved and unsaved together are definitely losing. Satan, sin, and the world are killing them. But those who make up the true Body of Christ will continue to enjoy victory over the world because we are truly children of God, trusting His truth, obeying His commands and loving Christians.

Because we know this to be true, we declare with Paul, *But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 15:57).*