

The Scriptures teach that the Old Covenant ceremonial practices typified or foreshadowed spiritual and eternal truths—for example, three times within the New Testament the apostle Paul makes the statement—“neither circumcision or uncircumcision means anything...”—that is, circumcision which is put for the whole of the ceremonial law was in itself nothing—it pictured or typified three things—[1] Gal.6:15—“in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything, but a new creation...” [2] Gal.5:6—“for in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything, but faith working through love...” and then [3] 1Cor.7:19—“circumcision is nothing and uncircumcision is nothing, but keeping the commandments of God is what matters...”

Thus we find that what truly matters is that a person be made a new creation, have faith that works by love, and keeps the commandments—new birth, faith, love, and obedience—these are what truly matters—and so it ought not surprise us when John continuously emphasizes these great truths—new birth, faith, love, and obedience to the commandments of God...

For example just consider the immediate context—[1] new birth, vv1, 4, [2] faith, vv1,4,5, [3] love, vv1,2,3, and [4] obedience, vv2,3—these are the essential benefits of the new covenant, Deut.30:6—“and the LORD your God will circumcise your heart...to love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul...” Jer.31:33—“I will put my law in their minds, and write it on their hearts...” Ezek.36:27—“I will put my Spirit within you and cause you to walk in my statutes...”—new birth, love, faith, and obedience to the commandments of God—these are absolutely essential to true religion and any preaching or public ministry that fails to major on these four things falls short of the biblical gospel as found in the old and new testaments...

Accordingly, John unashamedly returns once again to faith—now I think I would be right to assert, that our day is marked by great confusion concerning the nature, purpose, and place of faith—some have reduced it to a mere mental assent to the historical facts, others have all but replaced Christ with it—and yet as we shall see, while being an empty grace within itself, it plays an absolutely vital place in the application and outworking of our salvation...

- I. Who are overcomers?
- II. What do they overcome?
- III. How do they overcome?

#### I. Who are overcomers?

1. John provides a twofold description of overcomes, v4—“for whatever is born of God overcomes the world...” v5—“who is he who overcomes the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God...”
2. It’s important to notice that our passage begins with the word “for” indicating a close connection between what came before...
3. If you recall, in the previous verse John has told us that—“his commandments are not burdensome...”—why are the commandments no longer grievous to us, but because we have been born again and have overcome our native depravity...
4. By nature the commandments of God are a burden—they are grievous to us—we possess a positive aversion or hatred of them...
5. We find the collective desire of native man in Ps.2:3—“Let us break their bonds in pieces and cast away their cords from us...”
6. And so it’s not until a person becomes a partaker of the divine nature, it’s not until they are born of the Spirit and thus indwelt by the Spirit that such native enmity is overcome...
7. V3—“for this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments. And His commandments are not burdensome. (v4) For whatever is born of God overcomes the world...”
8. Thus we find that every person such overcoming is a universal blessing for every true Christian—for example notice the words “whoever” and “everyone” (v1), and “whatever” (v4)...

9. In other words, overcoming the world is not a limited blessing experienced only by the spiritually elite but is true of every person who is born again...
10. John Cotton—"Every Christian who has the least amount or shred of true grace, has a mighty power in him to overcome the world..."
11. Thus the Scriptures teach that every Christian is an overcomer—they are victorious—they are more than conquerors...

## II. What do they overcome?

1. Three times within these two verses John uses the word overcome [s]—it literally means—"to conquer, prevail, or to be victorious over..."
2. John tells us that they overcome the world—by which is meant—the philosophy and practices of fallen and depraved man...
3. It concerns that system, comprised of fallen man, at enmity against God, and controlled by the evil one, 1Jn.5:19—"the whole world lies in the power of the evil one..."
4. Martyn Lloyd-Jones—"Perhaps the best way of defining what the New Testament means by 'the world' is that it is everything that is opposed to God and His Spirit. God calls upon men and women to worship Him and to glory Him; He calls upon them to live for His glory...and the world is everything that tries to prevent our doing that..."
5. Thus here I want to open up the phrase—"overcome the world..."—what does it mean to be overcomers of this present world...
6. Well, you might recall that John has already answered this question to some degree earlier within this letter—notice [1] it means we have overcome the ruler of this world...
7. Consider 1Jn.2:13 the middle part—"I write to you, young men, because you have overcome the wicked one..."
8. We find the same thing again in the latter half of v14—"I have written to you, young men, because you are strong, and the word of God abides in you, and you have overcome the wicked one..."
9. Now if you recall when we considered these verses I suggested that "little children," "young men" and "fathers"—refer to various stages of spiritual maturity...
10. And yet if you remember I sought to clarify that all that's said of one is also true of the other three—but the apostle simply identifies certain character traits peculiar to each stage...
11. Young men are described as strong and overcomers—they have overcome the wicked one—they have overcome the devil...
12. But the question here becomes—what does it mean to overcome the evil one—I suggest the answer is found in 3:7-9...
13. V7—"little children, let no one deceive you. He who practices righteousness is righteous, just as he is righteous. He who sins is of the devil, for the devil has sinned from the beginning. For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil. Whoever has been born of God does not sin, for His seed remains in him; and he cannot sin, because he has been born of God..."
14. Now I simply want to point out a few things in passing within this rich passage—[a] Christ came to destroy the works of the devil (v8)...
15. If you notice, within the context, this has to do with work of Satan in binding and enslaving mankind in sin and wickedness...
16. Christ came to deliver enslaved sinners from sin and Satan—He came to deliver them from being the children of the devil who practiced sin (v10)...
17. Notice [b] Christ's work is accomplished through the new birth, v9—"whoever has been born of God does not sin..."—that is, does not continue in sin as he once did...
18. And why is this, but because he has overcome the world and in particular the evil one—he is no longer a slave to sin and Satan...
19. Thus we can conclude in the first place, that Christians have overcome the world, in that they have overcome the bondage of the devil...
20. Eph.2:1-6—"and you were dead in trespasses and sins, in which you once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of

- disobedience...but God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loves us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ, and raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus...”
21. Consider v8—“for by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God...”—this victory is given through faith [this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith]...
  22. Notice [2] it means we have overcome the attraction of this world—that is our affections are no longer fixed upon it in a dominant manner...
  23. 1Jn.2:15—“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...”
  24. By nature our hearts are fixed upon this world—it is the object of our desires and longing—in short, we love it...
  25. But notice what John tells us—“if anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him...”—in other words no person can love both the world and the Father...
  26. This of course doesn’t imply that the world no longer holds any attraction to the Christian whatsoever—no, he’s in constant need to—“do not love the world...”
  27. But he has overcome the dominant and overpowering attraction to the world—he has come to see what it truly is...
  28. He has come to see its promises are hollow and empty and its pleasures short-lived—he’s come to love one that’s fairer than the sons of men and in comparison this world is but a filthy harlot...
  29. Gal.6:14-15—“but may it never be that I should boast, except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world. For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything, but a new creation...”
  30. Notice that three things are here brought together—[a] the cross, [2] the world, and [3] a new creation [or birth]...
  31. Notice [3] it means we have overcome the thinking of this world—not only have we overcome acting and loving like the world, but also thinking like this world...
  32. 1Jn.4:4—“you are of God, little children, and have overcome them, because He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world...”
  33. If you recall by “them” the apostle is referring to the false teachers who were threatening the welfare of the churches...
  34. John says they have victory over them because they have the Holy Spirit living within them, who ensures that they know enough so as to secure their justification and preservation...
  35. But here I want to go a step further, and suggest that Christians not only overcome the false teaching of this world but the entirety of its godless philosophies...
  36. The longer I’m able to behold the world as a Christian, I am amazed at how backward or contrary it is with reference to the commandments of God...
  37. For example, think of the two leading presidential candidates for the Democratic Party—have you been listening to some of the promises their making if they are elected president...
  38. They will openly and aggressively fight to establish equal rights for homosexual couples and the right for a woman to kill her unborn child if she so pleases...
  39. Why do they think this way, and why are so few people unconcerned about it—but because this world is darkened by wicked philosophies and thinking...
  40. But how things change when a man or woman is born of the Spirit—for they now overcome the world with its ungodly thinking...
  41. But this isn’t to deny the need to continually overcome, Rom.12:2—“and do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of you mind...”
  42. Thus in summery John Gill says this about the phrase “overcomes the world”—“[that is] the god of the world, Satan; the lusts which are in the world; false prophets gone forth into the world; and the wicked men of the world, who by temptations, snares, evil doctrines, threatenings, promises, and ill examples, would avert regenerate ones from observing the commands of God; but such are more than conquerors over all these, through Christ that has loved them...”

### III. How do they overcome?

1. John provides the answer to this question by first stating it in v4 and then expanding upon it in v5, notice [1] simply stated, v4b—“and this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith...”
2. John here identifies in no uncertain terms, that it is “our faith” that has overcome the world—the verb refers to a past act with present results...
3. We have overcome the world, and are presently overcoming the world—this is further seen in v5—“who is he who overcomes the world, but he who believes [is presently believing] that Jesus is the Son of God...”
4. It is for this reason that over and over again John speaks in the book of Revelation of our need to overcome, Rev.21:7—“he who overcomes shall inherit all things, and I will be his God and he shall be my son...”
5. Now there have been some who [for whatever reason] feel uncomfortable with the statement—our faith has overcome the world...
6. As a result they have attempted to explain the phrase not referring to our personally faith in Christ, but to the collective truth of Scripture—“the faith...”
7. And the Scriptures do at times refer to itself as “the faith”—for example, Jude 1:3—“contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints...”
8. But John here doesn’t use the word in this way for two reasons—[a] the text does not say “the faith” but “our faith” and [b] John clarifies what he means in v5—“he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God...”
9. Thus what he means by “our faith” is a personal heartfelt faith in the gospel—faith is the means whereby the victory is applied or experienced by an individual person...
10. Now this is so much true that John actually equates the victory with our faith—“and this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith...”
11. Our faith has overcome this world—our faith is the victory that has enabled us to overcome this world—faith is the victory...
12. Now I want to clarify those statements in a moment, but for now I want you to feel the importance and centrality of the phrase—“our faith...”
13. Notice [2] expanded, v5b—“he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God...”—here we learn that faith in general is not our victory—but faith in Christ as the Son of God...”
14. We often hear from various politicians and positive thinkers of the necessity to “keep the faith” that we have to “believe and not give up...”
15. But oftentimes they fail to tell us in what are we to believe—are we to believe in our government, in the basic good of mankind, in blind fate, or in ourselves...
16. John answers this very plainly—“he who believes that Christ is the Son of God...”—he who believes in Christ as the Son of God...
17. Now here I want to take a few minutes and examine the statement of our Savior that likely served as the inspiration of John’s repeated use of the term “overcomes”...
18. Jn.16:33—“these things I have spoken to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world...”
19. Our Savior was soon to leave the world and return to the Father (v28)—but before this He had a baptism to undergo, v32—“indeed the hour is coming, yes, has now come, that you will be scattered, each to his won, and will leave me alone. And yet I am not alone, because the Father is with me...”
20. Our Savior here foretells His crucifixion and the fact they would be scattered—and yet, upon the very verge of this He says—“in the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world...”
21. Notice our Savior speaks of His victory over this world in the past test—“I have overcome the world...”—His entire life and death were the means whereby the world was overcome...
22. But primarily He’s alluding to the certainty of this victory as He was presently on the very eve of His crucifixion...
23. Thus it becomes very important for us to realize that Christians overcome the world because Christ overcame the world...

24. 1Cor.15:57—“but thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ...” 2Cor.2:14 —“now thanks be to God who always leads us in triumph in Christ...” Rom.8:37—“yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loves us...”
25. Now here I want to spend the final section of our time together answering the question—How is faith the victory...
26. Let me suggest three obvious ways—[1] faith gives us Christ—by this I mean that Christ is made ours through faith, Eph.3:17—“that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith...”
27. It is for this reason our Christian forefathers described faith as “the instrumental means” whereby salvation is obtained...
28. Strictly speaking we are saved by Christ through faith—Christ alone saves, but His salvation is applied or obtained through faith...
29. Thus it’s very important to understand that in and of itself faith is nothing—it is an empty grace—its power lays not in itself but in its object...
30. Let me illustrate—think of a lamp—in order for the lamp to have the ability to provide light it must be plugged into the wall, which draws energy from an external source...
31. Thus we could liken faith to the plug—without it the light is never going to work, and yet, the plug itself is nothing but a means...
32. F. F. Bruce—“By their faith in Jesus as the Son of God they are so united with Him that His victory becomes theirs; they conquer by His power...”
33. Notice [2] faith sets the soul working—true saving and sanctifying faith is energetic—it’s a living and active grace...
34. Gal.5:6—“for in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything, but faith working through love...”
35. Let me illustrate—think of a couple of men who live in an abandoned building—a building that has been scheduled for destruction...
36. And so the construction workers post signs all over the place—Beware this building is scheduled for destruction on such and such date...
37. Now let’s say that both of the men read the signs and profess to believe the, but only one moves out of the building to safety...
38. What would we say of the other man who remained in the building regardless of the fact, that the cranes were positioning themselves outside to demolish the building...
39. We would have to conclude that regardless how much this man professed to believe, the fact that he did nothing, proves his faith was feigned...
40. Jas.2:17—“thus also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead...”—in other words, if a man professes to believe in Christ and doesn’t work at overcoming this world his faith is not genuine...
41. Notice [3] faith brings invisible truths near—faith enables the soul to have presently experience future and spiritual realities...
42. Heb.11:1—“Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen...”—faith brings distant things close to the heart...
43. A.W. Pink—“Faith gives the object hoped for at a future period, a present reality and power in the soul, as if already possessed...”
44. Let me close up this sermon by briefly examining Moses, in whom we find an example of how our faith overcomes the world...
45. Heb.11:24-27—“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. By faith he forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king; for he endured as seeing Him who is invisible...”
- Rev.12:11—“and they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, and they did not love their lives to the death...”