

We have seen throughout John’s epistle
the interweaving of the doctrinal, the ethical, and the relational –
faith, obedience, and love,
what you know, what you do, what you love.

1. The Road to Love Is Paved with Faith and Obedience (5:1-5)

a. The Interlocking Nature of Faith, Love, and Obedience (v1-3)

¹ Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been born of God, and everyone who loves the Father loves whoever has been born of him.

Two weeks ago we heard that

“whoever loves has been born of God and knows God” (v7).

Last week we heard that

“whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him”

Tonight we hear that

“everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been born of God.”

Here John links together the relationship between faith and love in the Christian life.
As Robert Yarbrough says,

“The key to Christian identity...is love.
The road to love...is paved with faith.” (p269)

So here is the first point:

If you believe that Jesus is the Christ – that Jesus is the Messiah,
then you have been born of God.

This would seem to cast the net quite broadly!

Especially when linked with last week’s claim

“whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him,”

you can see that confessing that Jesus is the Son of God,
and believing that Jesus is the Christ
are at the very heart of what it means to be born of God.

Paul says the same thing in Romans 10 –

“if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord
and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead,
you will be saved.

For with the heart one believes and is justified,
and with the mouth one confesses and is saved.”

Confessing Jesus is the Son of God with your mouth is essential to salvation.
That’s why we recite the Creed every Lord’s Day.

But confessing Jesus is Lord is not just a Sunday thing.
That confession must be made throughout the week as well.
When others around you are confessing that money, sex, or power is Lord,
you must confess that Jesus is Lord.
Confessing Jesus as the Son of God
means acknowledging him as the one to whom we answer.

But believing that Jesus is the Christ is also essential to salvation.
You must believe that he is the Messiah – the anointed one –
who has come to fulfill all that God commanded of Israel,
and who has come to receive all that God promised to Israel.
He is the one who inherited everything that God promised
to Abraham, Moses, and David.

And if you believe that Jesus is the Christ,
then you have been born of God.

Jesus is the unique Son of God.
He is the Son of God from all eternity, begotten of the Father before all worlds,
but he is also the Son of God as the *one* who came in the flesh –
the incarnate Son of God who took our flesh;
and as such he was also *declared* to be the Son of God by the Spirit of holiness
through his resurrection from the dead.
In his incarnation and resurrection/ascension he became the Son of God
that Adam and Abraham, and Israel, and David failed to be.

You could put it this way:
he was the model that Adam and Abraham and Israel and David
were supposed to be like.
His eternal Sonship was the pattern that our created sonship
was supposed to imitate.

But sin marred the image –
rebellion destroyed any chance for a human sonship
that was patterned after the eternal Son.

And so the only way that we could be born of God –
the only way that we could participate in this new birth –
was if the eternal Son of God became the created Son of God,
so that he might become the resurrected and exalted Son of God.

And that is why everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been born of God.

But John will not let us think for a moment that a bare and empty faith
is all that is required!

Verse 2 is somewhat curious.

John usually says that we know that we love God when we love the brethren.
But here he turns us around:

² *By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and obey his commandments.*

After all, what does it mean to love?
When your friend steals a million dollars,
is it “love” to let him get away with it?
Love for God and obedience to his commands
defines love for the children of God!

The tendency today is to define love as tolerance or permissiveness.
But it is not love for me to encourage you to destroy yourself!

Certainly love requires me to listen to you –
because if I don’t understand you,
then I won’t be able to speak love into your life.
But I only love you when I love God and obey his commandments.

The Venerable Bede said it well in the 8th century,
“Only someone who is on fire with the love of his Maker
can be said to love his fellow humans in the right way.” (221)

There is much that is beautiful and noble in fallen humanity’s love.
Whether expressed in art (Shakespeare, Mozart),
or lived in the lives around us,
there is something beautiful there –
and yet also something dreadfully tragic.
At the end of Mozart’s *The Marriage of Figaro*,
the Countess nobly receives back her penitent husband
after numerous infidelities.
But you are left without the slightest hope that he will actually change his ways!

At best you are left with the hope that he will try harder!

True love for others can only be found when we love God!
If you want to love your wife better,
you can only do that by loving God better.
(And of course, the irony is
that if you love God for the sake of loving your wife better,
then you are not really loving God!)

As one commentator put it,
“If God means little to you, people will become worthless to you too,

and love even for them will die out” (Schlatter quoted in Yarbrough 273)

And you can see this in the way that Jesus speaks of the great commandment:
Love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul,
and with all your mind, and with all your strength.
In other words, love God with *everything*.

And love your neighbor as yourself.

But if you are to love God with *everything*,
then your love for your neighbor must be part of your love for God.

So you know that you are loving the children of God
when you 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.*

Again, Jesus had said that his yoke is easy and his burden is light (Matt 11),
so there is nothing burdensome about God’s commands.

In fact, obedience to God is the easiest and most natural thing imaginable!
It’s what we were created to do!
Obedience is natural, normal, and easy!

The only problem is sin!
Sin has twisted us and turned us away from the natural, the normal, and the easy.
We prefer the unnatural, the abnormal, and the difficult.
But the only reason we prefer these things
is because we do not love God.

Now, some of you may disagree with me
(or, actually, you’ll have to disagree with Jesus and John).
You may wish to say that obedience is *hard* –
that loving and obeying God does not come naturally or easily.

But the only reason why that is true
is because you are rebelling against God –
or, to say it another way, because *somewhere in your life*,
you are refusing to love God.

If your heart and mind are drawn toward the world –
if you are in love with the things of the world –
then you will find God and his commandments exceedingly burdensome!

You cannot love both God and the world.
You cannot serve two masters.
If you love God you will despise the world.
If you love the world you will despise God.

But John holds out hope for you:

b. Faith as the Victory that Overcomes the World (v4-5)

I want to see something *really* important here.

When it comes to the victory –
when it comes to the triumph – the overcoming of the world –
John does not talk about obedience
(he does not say that our obedience overcomes the world)
John does not talk even about love
(he does not say that our love overcomes the world) –
rather, he says that the victory that has overcome the world
is “our faith.”

But notice how John sets it up.

He starts with the general statement:

⁴For everyone who has been born of God overcomes the world.

Now, remember how John has talked about this:

“No one born of God makes a practice of sinning” (3:9)

“whoever loves has been born of God” (4:7)

“everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been born of God”

In other words,

John has already used all three of our central concepts:

obedience, love, faith.

All three are essential to being born of God.

So, everyone who has been born of God

(and therefore, by definition, believes, loves, and obeys)
overcomes the world.

But *how* does the one who has been born of God overcome the world?

Do you overcome the world by love?

Does love triumph over all?

No.

Do you overcome the world by obedience?

Is doing your duty – the categorical imperative –
the way that you triumph over the world?

No.

What is the victory that has overcome the world?

And this is the victory that has overcome the world— our faith.

John will insist that love and obedience are absolutely essential
to the one who is born of God.
You cannot say that you are born of God without love and obedience.
But love and obedience –
at least *your* love and obedience –
cannot overcome the world.

Why is that?

Well, consider verse 5:

⁵*Who is it that overcomes the world except the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?*

Remember that the world (in John's view) is hostile to God.
The world – and everything in the world – is opposed to God.

And yet, John says, *you* overcome the world *by faith* –
and not just by faith in general –
the faith that we speak of is not a “faith in faith” –
that if I just believe *something* that will be enough.

Quite frankly, a generic “I need to believe in something”
is no better than a generic love.

You need to believe that Jesus is the Son of God.

And that is the point that John turns to in verses 6-12.

Because *Jesus* is the object of that faith that overcomes the world.

And in verses 6-12, John deals with the warrant for faith.

Why should you believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God?
And *why* is faith in *him* (and *only* in him) able to overcome the world?

2. The Object of Faith: Jesus Christ (5:6-12)

John starts with the testimony that authenticates the belief that Jesus is the Son of God.

a. The Testimony of God: the Spirit, the Water, and the Blood (v6-9)

⁶This is he who came by water and blood—Jesus Christ; not by the water only but by the water and the blood.

Verse 6 says that Jesus came by water and blood.

Most agree that “blood” refers to his death –
but there is some disagreement over whether “water”
refers to his birth or his baptism.

I would suggest that when you consider the context
(the testimony of God concerning Jesus),
it is more compelling to see this as his baptism,
because at his baptism the Spirit descended on him,
and the Father declared, “this is my beloved Son.”

Verses 6b-8 confirm this approach:

And the Spirit is the one who testifies, because the Spirit is the truth. ⁷For there are three that testify: ⁸the Spirit and the water and the blood; and these three agree.

Notice in verse 6b that there is one who testifies – the Spirit,
and in verse 7 there are three that testify – the Spirit the water and the blood!

There are three that testify that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God.

The water of his baptism,
the blood of his cross,
and the Spirit.

The Spirit testified by water at Jesus’ baptism,
as Jesus received the Holy Spirit at the Jordan River,
in preparation for his Messianic service.

The Spirit testified by blood in the cross of Christ,
as Paul says in Romans 1, as the Spirit of holiness
who declared Jesus to be the Son of God
through his resurrection of the dead.

But why does the Spirit testify in this way?

As Calvin put it, Christ “came by water and blood
in order that the Spirit may witness concerning him,
lest the salvation imparted through him escape us.” (III.i.1)

If Christ had died and been raised from the dead –
but God had never told us about it –
then what good would it have been?

As Luther put it, “No matter how much the Gospel is preached,
no one accepts it unless the Spirit is present” (in Yarbrough, 283).

And because of the testimony of the Spirit,
the water and the blood continue to testify as well –
that Jesus is the Son of God incarnate.

We hear the Spirit's testimony through the reading and preaching of the Word.

We see the Spirit's testimony through the water and the blood as well
in the baptism of Daniel Pitts this morning,
and weekly in the Lord's Supper as we partake of Christ's body and blood.

And because the Spirit has testified to us through the water and the blood, then,

⁹ If we receive the testimony of men, the testimony of God is greater, for this is the testimony of God that he has borne concerning his Son.

Do you believe that George Washington was the first president of the United States?
Why do you believe that?
Because someone told you.

(By the way, that person was wrong!
Samuel Huntingdon was the first President of the United States,
and John Hanson was the first man elected President in 1781)

But if you receive my testimony about this,
then you should certainly receive God's testimony –
because God's testimony is greater than man's.

I want you to see that John is not concerned
with rational proofs that would convince skeptics.
John is not trying to argue people *into* the faith.
He is saying that if you say you love God and if you say you believe him,
then you should believe his testimony –
you should believe what he says!

And what is more:

b. The Reception of God's Testimony: Life in the Son (v10-12)

¹⁰Whoever believes in the Son of God has the testimony in himself.

Because the one who believes in the Son of God
has been born of God and knows God and loves God and brother.
If you believe in the Son, then you have the Spirit who testifies within you.

But,

Whoever does not believe God has made him a liar, because he has not believed in the testimony that God has borne concerning his Son.

If you don't believe the testimony that God has given in the water and the blood –
then you don't believe God –
and you are claiming that God is a liar.

If God has spoken, and you do not believe him,
then you are making God out to be a liar.

But what testimony is this that God has spoken?

¹¹*And this is the testimony, that God gave us eternal life, and this life is in his Son.*

Life.

Death haunts our footsteps.
We live under the impending sentence of doom.
But this is the testimony,
that God gave us eternal life –
and this life is in his Son.

¹²*Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life.*

There is no compromise with John.
If you have the Son, you have life.
If you do not have the Son, you do not have life.

There is nothing obscure or difficult about John's point.
If you do not believe that Jesus is the Son of God,
then you abide in death.