

# **That You May Know That You Have Eternal Life**

## **The New Birth**

*1 John 5:1-5*

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# The New Birth

## Scripture

In her book titled *Stay Salt*, Rebecca Manley Pippert writes about the renowned child psychiatrist Robert Coles in which he told this story in a graduate class at Harvard University many years ago: “A highly regarded psychiatrist recently told me in despair: ‘I have been doing therapy with a man for 15 years. He is as angry, as self-centered, and as mean as he was the first day he walked into my office. The only difference is that now he knows why he is so angry and mean.’ ”

Manley notes that Dr. Coles pointed out that although the psychiatrist provided his client with insight as to how his childhood emotional wounding had affected his adult dysfunction, the man still hadn’t changed. Coles asked, “Could we conclude that what this man needed wasn’t just information but transformation? But is transformation possible for human beings?”<sup>1</sup>

The answer that the Bible gives is that transformation is definitely possible for human beings. Indeed, not only do angry, self-centered, and mean people need transformation; *all* people need transformation. Such transformation comes only by the new birth. The Holy Spirit regenerates and transforms people into new creations in Christ.

Let’s read about the new birth in 1 John 5:1-5:

**<sup>1</sup> 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. <sup>2</sup> By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and**

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<sup>1</sup> Rebecca Manley Pippert, *Stay Salt* (New Malden, Surry: Good Book Company, 2020), 137-138.

obey his commandments. <sup>3</sup> For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments. And his commandments are not burdensome. <sup>4</sup> For everyone who has been born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world – our faith. <sup>5</sup> Who is it that overcomes the world except the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God? (1 John 5:1-5)

## Introduction

The Apostle John wrote his First Letter around 90 AD. He was responsible for the oversight of churches in the region of Ephesus and it was to these dear people of God that John wrote this letter. The reason for the letter is that false teachers were denying that Jesus was the Son of God. So John wrote to correct the error of the false teachers and also to reassure the believers that they may know that they have eternal life.

John's correction of the false teaching was done by setting down three tests by which one may evaluate whether one has a saving relationship with God. The tests are moral, social, and doctrinal, also known as tests of obedience, love, and belief. John has repeated and restated these three tests throughout his letter. Commentator John Stott summarizes John's combination of the three tests as follows:

In chapter 2 he describes all three tests in order, obedience (3–6), love (7–11) and belief (18–27). In chapter 3 he treats only obedience (2:28–3:10) and love (11–18), while in chapter 4 only belief (1–6) and love (7–12). In 4:13–21 he has combined the doctrinal and social tests. Now, however, in the brief opening paragraph of chapter 5, we meet the three together again. The words “believe” and “faith” occur in verses 1, 4 and 5, “love” in verses 1, 2 and 3, and the need to obey

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or carry out “his commands” in verses 2 and 3. What John is at pains to show is the essential unity of his threefold thesis. He has not chosen three tests arbitrarily or at random and stuck them together artificially. On the contrary, he shows that they are so closely woven together into a single, coherent fabric that it is difficult to unpick and disentangle the threads.<sup>2</sup>

Moreover, it is important to note that the link between these three tests is the new birth. John mentions the new birth in verse 1 (twice) and also in verse 4.

### Lesson

First John 5:1-5 shows us what the new birth produces. Let's use the following outline:

1. The New Birth Produces Belief (5:1a, 4-5)
2. The New Birth Produces Love (5:1b-2a)
3. The New Birth Produces Obedience (5:2b-3)

#### I. The New Birth Produces Belief (5:1a, 4-5)

First, the new birth produces belief.

John writes in verse 1a, **“Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been born of God.”** The *New International Version* translates verse 1a as follows, “Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God.” This gives the impression that the new birth is the result of belief. However, the *English Standard Version* has correctly interpreted the Greek text. The Greek word for **“believes”** is in the present tense and the Greek word for **“has been born”** is in the perfect

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<sup>2</sup> John R. W. Stott, *The Letters of John: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 19, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1988), 171.

tense. That means that the present activity of belief is due to the past completed action of birth. This is a very important point. The new birth produces belief.

I have mentioned before that Billy Graham, for whom I have a great deal of respect, used to say, “To become a Christian, you must be born again.” And then he would go on to say, “In order to be born again, you must believe.” For Billy Graham, belief produces the new birth. However, for John, it was just the opposite: the new birth produces belief.

Notice again what John says in verse 1a, **“Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been born of God.”** John is opposing false teaching that has arisen in the churches for which he has oversight. John insists that Jesus is the Christ, the Messiah, the Anointed One sent by God to be the savior of sinners. The new birth, which is itself a gift of God, enables a person to believe that there is no savior other than Jesus.

John writes in verse 4, **“For everyone who has been born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world – our faith.”** John sets forth an astonishing truth in this verse. The believer has been “born of God.” The believer is a born-again, new creation in Christ. The believer is now a child of God. The believer has belief in Jesus. And because of the believer’s new status with God, the believer overcomes the world. The reason for this is the believer’s union with Christ. Christ defeated Satan by living a perfect, sinless life. God confirmed Christ’s victory by raising him from the dead three days after his crucifixion and death. Because believers are now in union with Christ and abide in him, they have **“the victory that has overcome the world.”**

This truth is a great comfort to believers. Believers overcome the world by resisting Satan. Believers are enabled to resist Satan’s temptations to unbelief and disobedience. Because

we belong to Jesus, we are enabled to say “No!” to sin. That does not mean it will be easy. I think of believers who live in countries where they are severely persecuted for their belief. However, they can stand firm against the persecution. Indeed, they can “overcome the world” because they have faith in Jesus. They know that as hard as it is to live under persecution, it is only temporary. One day, they will be released from the persecution and enjoy the blessings of glory that await those who remain faithful.

John writes in verse 5, **“Who is it that overcomes the world except the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?”** Three times in verses 4-5 John tells his readers about overcoming the world. It is important to John that his readers understand that overcoming the world is only accomplished by belief that Jesus is the Son of God. The one who **“overcomes the world”** is the one who resists the devil and his temptations to unbelief and disobedience.

The vast majority of people in the world do not acknowledge that they are under the influence and power of the devil. They believe that they are autonomous and can make their own decisions and follow their own path. But that is exactly what the devil wants them to do. He wants people to disobey God’s command to repent of sin and believe in Jesus. The devil does not want people to submit to God and obey God’s commandments.

Are you overcoming the world – or are you being overcome by the world? There is no mistaking the fact that believers are really warriors in a world that is out to destroy them. Imagine, if you will, a Christian warrior in the heat of battle.

The setting is in the believer’s home. The believer is in his or her comfortable chair. The believer is holding the television’s remote control and flipping from channel to channel. As

the individual flips through the channels, the enemy soon appears:

- On one channel profanity abounds and God’s name is cursed.
- On another channel you see more skin than clothes.
- On one more channel morality is mocked as if it were a vice, a sin.
- On yet another channel – well, you do not want to know.

On and on the list could go. The Christian believer begins to reel from the blows of the world. He is ever so close to giving up and giving in. He is drowning in the sewage-filled waves. How can he save himself from this situation? What turns the tide during the believer’s battle with the world? Faith and only faith will scatter the enemy.

With a mighty sweep of his hand, the Christian warrior presses the “off” button and thwarts another effort by the world to drag him down. Overcoming faith is *believing* that God is in control and then *acting* on it!<sup>3</sup>

So, first, the new birth produces belief.

## II. The New Birth Produces Love (5:1b-2a)

Second, the new birth produces love.

John writes in verse 1b, “...and everyone who loves the Father loves whoever has been born of him.” John teaches that believers in Jesus now love the Father and also love fellow believers who are also recipients of the new birth. John’s teaching is both simple and profound. A believer is one who believes

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<sup>3</sup> Leadership Ministries Worldwide, *Practical Illustrations: 1 Peter, 2 Peter, 1 John, 2 John, 3 John, Jude* (Chattanooga, TN: Leadership Ministries Worldwide, 2003), 27–28.

that Jesus is his savior. He is enabled to believe this because of the new birth. His life is radically transformed so that he now loves the Father. And he also loves fellow believers.

Perhaps the best example of this truth is Saul of Tarsus. He was deeply entrenched in believing that obedience to the Law of God is what saved a person. He was so opposed to the teaching that Jesus was the Christ sent from God that he had Christians thrown into jail. Then one day, he encountered the Lord Jesus Christ. He experienced the new birth. He was born of God. He believed that Jesus was indeed the Christ, the Messiah, the Anointed One sent by God to be the savior of sinners. He discovered a new love for God. And he also discovered a new love for his fellow believers. In fact, he gave the rest of his life to loving God and serving his fellow believers.

John then goes on to write in verse 2a, **“By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God.”** John keeps pounding away at the truth that love for God and love for people are closely connected. He usually says that love for God is shown in love for people. However, here in this verse, John reverses the truth by saying that we love people when we love God. In other words, love for God and love for people are inseparably connected. They go together and form a unity.

We live in a time of cultural confusion. It reminds me of the summarizing statement for the book of Judges, “Everyone did what was right in his own eyes” (Judges 21:25b). Vast numbers of people are deciding what is morally correct and shame those who disagree with them. The challenge for Christians is to be salt and light in an ever-decaying and ever-darkening culture. What must not be done is to capitulate to the culture. That is what liberal Protestants did and their impact on the culture is zero. Biblical Christianity teaches us that the new birth produces love – love for God and love for one another.



A powerful illustration of the new birth producing love is that of Louis Zamperini. Laura Hillenbrand wrote a biography of Zamperini titled *Unbroken: A World War II Story of Survival, Resilience, and Redemption*. Most of us learned of Zamperini in the movie that was titled *Unbroken*. Louis Zamperini was a former Olympic runner who ditched his plane off Oahu, Hawaii during World War II. He drifted 2,000 miles in 47 days on a life raft and was eventually picked up by a Japanese vessel. He was a prisoner for the two remaining years of the war. He was starved and horribly tortured by his captors. At home he was given up for dead. In fact, he is in possession of his own death certificate signed by President Roosevelt.

After World War II ended, Zamperini said he left Japan in 1945 with hatred in his heart against his captors. But in 1949 he was saved at one of Billy Graham's meetings in Los Angeles. He was born again.

"There is such a change in my life that I feel I have a duty to perform," Zamperini told his friends. "That duty is to return to Japan and tell them of the saving power of the Lord Jesus Christ." And Zamperini did just that. He was transformed by the new birth and then loved those who had been his enemies.<sup>4</sup>

So, first, the new birth produces belief. Second, the new birth produces love.

### **III. The New Birth Produces Obedience (5:2b-3)**

And third, the new birth produces obedience.

John expresses this truth in verse 2b-3, "**...and obey his commandments. For this is the love of God, that we keep**

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<sup>4</sup> Leadership Ministries Worldwide, *Practical Illustrations: 1 Peter, 2 Peter, 1 John, 2 John, 3 John, Jude* (Chattanooga, TN: Leadership Ministries Worldwide, 2003), 54.

**his commandments. And his commandments are not burdensome.”** The phrase **“love of God”** means “love for God.” John is teaching his beloved flock that love for God is demonstrated by keeping his commandments. John is not a legalist. He knows that one who is loved wants to please his Beloved. And the Beloved has not left things unstated about how he is to be pleased. He has given his commandments that will please him when obeyed. Moreover, believers discover that God’s **“commandments are not burdensome.”** It is not that keeping God’s commandments is always easy. But they are always a delight.

There is a song titled, “I Would Do Anything for You.” The first stanza says, “I would swim the ocean wide / I would cross the great divide / I would do most anything for you / I would take a trip to Mars / I would even count the stars / I would do most anything for you.”

Some comedian added, “But if it rains on Saturday night, I won’t be able to come and see you.”

Sometimes we profess that we will do great things to show our obedience to God, but we don’t do the little things. God’s commandments are summarized in the Ten Commandments. Keeping them is evidence of the new birth in our lives.

One day the father of young twins walked into their playroom and was struck by the whirlwind that took place while he was out.

“What a mess. Guys, before you come down for supper, I want you to pick up all these toys and put them back where they belong,” said the father as he left the room.

One of the twins got a gleam in his eye. “I’m going to surprise dad. I’m going to build him something special with these blocks: maybe a bridge...or a giant tower.”

The other twin looked at his brother and blinked a couple

of times. Then he looked at the blocks and said, “Not me. I’m going to do what Dad said. I want to eat!”<sup>5</sup>

How often do I substitute obedience for one of my own ideas, thinking it will turn out better? Friends, obedience to God’s commandments is evidence that I have been born again.

So, first, the new birth produces belief. Second, the new birth produces love. And third, the new birth produces obedience.

## Conclusion

Therefore, having analyzed the topic of the new birth in 1 John 5:1-5, let us be sure that we have been born again.

In England is a paper factory that makes the finest stationery in the world. One day a man touring the factory asked what the stationery was made from. He was shown a huge pile of old rags and told that the rag content was what determined the quality of the paper. The visitor wouldn’t believe it. In a few weeks, he received from the company a package of paper with his initials embossed on it. On the top piece were written the words, “Dirty rags transformed.”

The same is true of the Christian life. It is a process of transformation from what we were into something new and wonderful.<sup>6</sup>

It is called the new birth. And the new birth produces belief, love, and obedience.

So, let me ask you: Have you been born again?

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<sup>5</sup> Leadership Ministries Worldwide, *Practical Illustrations: 1 Peter, 2 Peter, 1 John, 2 John, 3 John, Jude* (Chattanooga, TN: Leadership Ministries Worldwide, 2003), 60.

<sup>6</sup> Michael P. Green. *Illustrations for Biblical Preaching*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1996), 81.

# Mission Statement

The Mission Statement of the Tampa Bay Presbyterian Church  
is:

*To bring people to Jesus Christ  
and membership in his church family,  
develop them to Christlike maturity,  
equip them for their ministry in the church  
and life mission in the world,  
in order to magnify God's name.*

## Sermons by Rev. Freddy Fritz

This sermon, and other sermons, by the Rev. Freddy Fritz can  
be found at:

1. [www.tampabaypresbyterian.org/sermons](http://www.tampabaypresbyterian.org/sermons).
2. [www.sermoncentral.com/contributors/freddy-fritz-sermons-11181.asp](http://www.sermoncentral.com/contributors/freddy-fritz-sermons-11181.asp).
3. [www.sermonaudio.com/source\\_detail.asp?sourceid=Fred-dyFritz](http://www.sermonaudio.com/source_detail.asp?sourceid=Fred-dyFritz).

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