

Overcoming the World

1 John 5:1-5

When we read Scripture, we find that our questions and concerns are addressed as if it was written to us. It was not, but all of it was written for us. The sufficiency of Scripture means that everything we need for life and godliness is found in or addressed in principle by the Bible. These are our perennial questions: “Who is God?”; “Who are my people?”; “How should I live?” In this passage John shows the three threads of assurance—doctrine, love, and obedience—are an unbreakable cord that overcomes the world.

Born to Love

The one who believes *has been born* (perfect tense) of God (v1). You don’t believe in God and then become born again, but are born again in order to believe. How do you know you’ve been born of God? Because you believe Jesus is the Christ—the messiah, the anointed one, the redeemer who was sent by the Father to save the world (v1). The one begotten also loves the begetter, and also loves him who is begotten (v1). All this talk about begetting emphasizes that Jesus is *the* begotten. He is eternally begotten of the Father, but in the context of the new birth, God “raised up Jesus. As it is also written in the second Psalm: ‘You are My Son, Today I have begotten You’” (Acts 13:33). We died with Christ, but then we also rose with Him, which is why we are born again into everlasting, resurrection life. Your life is one of abounding, believing, hoping, and enduring love for God and all who are begotten of Him. He will not have it any other way. If you are begotten of your heavenly Father and honor Him, then you must love those who are begotten of Him, with all of their faults (and they with yours). We’re familiar with broken families where fathers do not love their children and children do not love their fathers. But it’s also sinful when a child loves his parents, but lives at odds with his siblings. Parents, don’t oppose conflicts between your kids because they’re annoying, but because it’s not the way the Father allows His children to act. Fathers are responsible for the fellowship of everyone in the home. And if you want to keep the 5th Commandment and honor your father and mother, you must love your siblings, and urge them to love your parents. Christians who have not done what they can to get back into and remain in fellowship with other Christians are sinning against their new birth, against God our Father and Christ our brother. It’s not always possible to mend things, seeking and granting forgiveness, but where it is, we must do so. We were born to love this way.

The Lightness of Obedience

John just said that in order to love God whom we have not seen, we must love our brother whom we have seen (4:20-21). Now he goes the other way and says we know that we love God’s children when we love Him and keep His commandments (v2). John couldn’t be clearer: “For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments. And His commandments are not burdensome” (v3). He is rewording what he heard Jesus say: “If you love Me, keep my commandments” (Jn. 14:15). Commenting on this verse, John Stott points out “Love for God is not an emotional experience so much as a moral commitment.” It does not follow that all moral commitments constitute love for God; only those motivated by faith and love for Him. God’s commandments are not heavy! They come from His loving, blessing, just, kind, and wise character, which is why keeping them *is* loving. God’s is not burdening, squeezing, exploiting, unrewarding, taking, or crushing. The way you see Him is the way you will think of His commandments. Is He a hard master (Matt. 25:24)? Is your Bible a sweet and refreshing word from Him, or as a guilt-inducing obligation to check off or avoid? The Pharisees piled heavy burdens on people’s shoulders (Matt. 23:4). But Jesus said, “Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for

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I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls” (Matt. 11:28-29). Those who won't keep God's commandments are bogged down and tired, but those who do them are rested and refreshed.

The Victory of Faith

Three times in verses four and five John uses the word “overcome”. The one born of God overcomes the world (v4a), our faith has overcome the world (v4b), and the knockout, who overcomes the world but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God (v5). Notice that Jesus did not come to allow us to personally escape the world, rapture out of it, hit our goals, or even to individually succeed. The one born of Him overcomes the world because Jesus did. What is the “world” in this context? Anyone and anything that would stand against God and His plan to save the world. Verse one identifies Jesus as the anointed messiah and savior, and in verse five He is named the Son of God. This is the King, the Son of God like Solomon was God's son, the one who will build God's house and reign forever (2 Sam. 7:13-14). Jesus overcame the world definitively on the cross, taking death upon Himself. By faith that finished victory is ours. But our faith also overcomes the world in real time. We see the strongholds of the enemy fall as the good news goes out, as grace wins and sinners come to know Christ, as we love the brethren and keep His commandments. Like Jesus, we don't run away from death: “And [the brethren] overcame [the accuser] by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, and they did not love their lives to the death” (Rev. 12:11). Trusting Christ, you can't lose. So believe and overcome.