

The First Epistle of John

...so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ (1John 1:3)

1John 5:4-5

Review

Where is John writing from?

What heresy was he addressing?

What flavor of Gnosticism was John specifically dealing with?

What did the heretics teach?

How does John deal with this false teaching?

1John 1:6-10

Someone read vv4:18-21

Someone else read vv5:1-6

John is constructing a threefold test of authentic Christianity: truth, righteousness, and love. John says three specific times in this letter that, if you claim to know God, but yet walk in the darkness of disobedience, you are a liar (v 1:6). Later, he says that to claim to possess the Father and yet deny the deity and incarnation of the Son is also to be a liar (2:4). There cannot be a genuine Christian life and yet a denial of the deity and incarnation of the Son. Thirdly, to claim to love God while you ignore or mistreat your brothers and sisters, is to lie (4:20). You are a liar if you say you love God and yet you do not love your brothers. This is the absence of love.

And if you live in the realm of lies, where do you live? (GJn 8:44)

Let's look more closely at vv4-5:

For whatever is born of God overcomes the world; and this is the victory that overcomes the world, our faith. Who is it that overcomes the world but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God? {1 Jn 5:4-5 RSV}

What the "for" there for?

Gives the reason that God's Commandments are not burdensome. What is the commandment?

But why does the conquest of the world keep His commandments from being burdensome?

The temptation to love the world and its pleasures, or oneself, is overcome by our new nature in Christ.

According to John Stott: “The new birth is prominent in the context, so the emphasis is upon the new nature and consequent new ability to cope with God’s commandments.

Why does John write “whatever” instead of “whoever”? (Greek: *pan vs tis*)

Stresses that it is not the victorious *person* but the victorious *power*. The emphasis is not on the individual believer, but is open to all who share the same source (Westcott).

And why does he write in the passive voice “is born of God” rather than in the active voice “God bears”?

Stresses the origin of the new birth - God is the One who gives new life.

Why is the word, “overcomes”, present tense?

Signifies continuous aspect: “Keeps on overcoming.”

What is the relationship between victory and faith? (Greek: *nike* and *pistis*)

Faith produces victory. And as we gain victory, it engenders more faith. The two terms are “appositional” in the Greek. Apposition is a fancy way of saying when two nouns are close together in the same context, one noun explains or clarifies the other.

For example, if I were to say “the plumber, John, fixed my pipes,” John and plumber are appositional – John clarifies who we mean by plumber.

See GJn 5:18 for a Biblical example.

So, John is clarifying victory as our faith in God. For John, these two terms point to one truth.

Does this mean that all who have been born of God will always be victorious of sin and the Evil One?

No, but any failure is 100% on our side, never on God’s.

Let’s move on. Someone read v5.

Who is it that overcomes the world but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?

John now turns his thought from the principle of victory to the victorious individual. And who does the victorious individual believe in? Jesus, the Son of God. The implication is that if the one so described is not victorious over the world, then no one is.

As the commentator Hiebert writes: Involved is the basic fact of the Incarnation, but it is not belief in the Incarnation as a formula, but belief in the One who has become incarnate.”

To deny that Jesus is the Son of God is to nullify the whole Gospel and effectively deny the Apostolic testimony of salvation and the resultant victory in Him. Acceptance of this message, on the other hand, gives the believer a personal assurance and certain victory in his conflict with the world, the flesh, and the Devil. True Christian faith is Christological (that is, it deals with the totality of who the Son of God really is).

So, how can we make a practical application of this message?

When we seek to show love to others, to obey the Word, and to proclaim these doctrinal truths of the Scriptures, there is sometimes a tendency for us to feel that our success as Christians is a result of our faithful efforts. We get an Elijah complex: "We're the only ones left who are true to God." We tend to regard others as being unfaithful in varying degrees. But when we feel like that, we are never so wrong!

For John now declares that through these activities to overcome the world, it never is a result of our efforts. Effort is involved, but the results do not come from that. Victory is a sign that we have the Lord himself within us. Our efforts are but a sign of the presence of the life of God, the Lord Jesus himself. Without that, everything else would be futile. It is not we who overcome the world, but it is he in us. All that we contribute is simply the fact that we believe in his life at work in us. Thus, our faith in him overcomes the world.

Now, when you consider what is involved in this term ‘the world,’ you can see what John means. Think of the moral pressures that we face in the world today, the outlook and standards of the godless society that are surrounding us on every side, pressing in upon us, constantly intruding upon our consciousness with tremendous pressure to make us conform to these attitudes and standards of life. Think of the temptation to cheat and to lie, to get ahead at all costs, to be dishonest, to overreach; not only in filling out our income tax but in every aspect of business.

You men know that it takes power to be honest in business. To be surrounded by the low moral standards which exist in many businesses today, to be under constant temptation to take advantage of people, to maneuver, manipulate, ride roughshod over other people's rights, and yet do right; it takes power to live in that kind of society. You who live in it know that it does. These are the pressures that come upon us from the world.

The pressure to sexual looseness. Pressure to feed the fire, to satisfy the urge, to give in, to give up, to go the all way, though it may be wrong and deadly. The pressures around us are tremendous these days, seemingly overpowering at times. There is the pressure to harbor wrong ideas, to react against others the way the world reacts, to strike back, to fight back,

and give as good as you get, to be resentful and jealous, to be ambitious and cruel. There are pressures to follow some of the attractive heresies that are about us in these theologically loose days, which offer popularity and social acceptance.

The world -- the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life -- all this is of the world. Well, how do you overcome it? How can you manifest the life of Jesus Christ in the midst of that kind of pressure? How can you go on, moment by moment, day after day, year after year, living a life that is absolutely contrary to that, based on totally different standards, totally different objectives, totally different evaluations; how do you do it? And to endure not only for ten years, but twenty, thirty, forty, fifty, sixty years, against that kind of moral pressure. How do you do it? How do you overcome the world? How do you keep steady; how do you keep unmoved in the midst of this? Not only to keep unmoved but actually move out and win others to your side?

Well, John says it is "by faith," and that is all. Not by the faith that you once exercised twenty years ago when you first became a Christian, but by faith in the life of Jesus present in you now. By faith in him at work in you, moment by moment, in the midst of the pressure, countering it with the pressure of his own life.

Now that is a picture of the battle that you and I are engaged in. How do you win? Well, the issue does not lie in your fighting.

You do need to fight. You do need to pray, and read the Scriptures, and study, and know God's Word. You need to apply it in every situation. You need to put on the whole armor of God when the enemy comes against you like a roaring lion, sweeping all before him. You do need to stand.

But none of this is of any avail unless you are recognizing that it is the life of God within you that makes the difference, it is he who wins. It is he who overcomes. Your dependence is on his activity in you. When you do that, it is a different story.

If we give in, if we reflect the same attitudes as the world, if our actions are the same as those of the world, we have succumbed to the world, we are victims of it. We have succumbed to the wiles of the devil. We have lost our testimony, and all possible power to witness. But if our dependence is on the life of the Son of God, moment by moment, his life is in us then, "this is the victory that overcomes the world, even our faith." Who is it that overcomes the world but he who continues to believe that Jesus is the Son of God? The Son of God, the Strong One, the One who could say to his disciples, "be of good cheer; I have overcome the world," {John 16:33b KJV}.