

Week 9 – 1 John 5:1-12

Overcoming the World

“And this is the testimony, that God gave us eternal life, and this life is in his Son.” ([1 John 5:11](#), ESV)

“What does it look like when we’re born of God?” John lists five evidences in the first verses of Chapter 5.

1. We keep believing in Jesus as the Messiah.
2. We keep loving God as Father.
3. We keep loving those born of God.
4. We keep doing God’s commands.
5. We keep overcoming the world.

John weaves faith, love, and obedience together inextricably.

John then lists the three witnesses of who Jesus Christ is. He is saying is that the eternal Son of God is the same person with the historical Jesus. Jesus coming in history was with clear, irrefutable evidence. The three reliable witnesses are the “Spirit,” “water,” and “blood.”

- **1 John 5:1** – *“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.”*

They usually interpret this passage in one of two ways.

The first interpretation is that the passage clearly states how one is born again; that *belief* is the cause of being born again.

The second interpretation is that the passage offers another “test” or evidence that one has truly been born again; that *belief* is the result or evidence of one who has been born again.

“To discern whether a person is a true Christian, one need to look at what that person truly believes about Jesus Christ. To believe in Jesus as ‘the Christ’ means to trust him as God’s Messiah, his unique Anointed One, and have faith in him. It means believing that Jesus of Nazareth was God’s one and only Son and that he was anointed by God’s Spirit to preach the gospel, heal the sick, raise the dead, die on the cross for sin, and rise from the dead to become the Savior [In essence, affirm the [Apostle’s Creed](#)]. The tenses of the Greek verbs indicate that belief is the *result*, not the *cause*, of the new birth.”¹

This is not saying that belief does not save, because without question, faith (belief) alone saves ([John 1:12](#)). However, the faith that saves is not alone, but gives evidence that it is genuine by bearing fruit or works as James calls it ([James 2:14-26](#)).

John, having provided these tests of belief in other passages, also leads us to see this as another test.

1. Obey God’s commands in His word: [2:3-6](#), [2:28-29](#), [3:10](#), [5:2-3](#).
2. Love God and other believers: [2:9-11](#), [3:14-17](#), [4:7-8](#), [5:1-3](#).
3. Believe in the truth of the Gospel message that Jesus Christ is the Savior: [2:22-25](#), [4:2-3](#), [5:1](#), [5:4-5](#).

- **1 John 5:2** – *“By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and obey*

¹ (Bruce B. Barton, Life Application Bible Commentary (Wheaton Ill, Tyndale House Publishers) [105](#))

his commandments.”

John is stating the cause and effect of the commandment that Jesus gave in John's Gospel. Rather than a commandment, John is saying that you show obedience by your actions.

“A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.” ([John 13:34-35](#))

Notice that you can say you love God, but John links what you say with what you do ([1 John 3:18](#)).

- **1 John 5:3** – *“For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments. And his commandments are not burdensome.”*

This connection between love for God and obedience to His commandments is meant as a protection against thinking of love for God as “emotional feelings” about God.

You show our love for God by obedience to His commandments. You must believe all of God's commandments are only for your benefit. Otherwise, you are saying you do not trust God. You cannot love someone who you cannot trust. Therefore, your obedience shows your loving trust in His commandments.

When faced with the choice to obey or disobey, motivate yourself by the truth (and by the Spirit – [1 John 4:13](#), [Philippians 2:12-13](#)) that obedience shows you love Him. Don't say you love God, *show* you love God. Obey out of *love*, not *legalism*.

The reason God's commandments are not burdensome is that God never asks you to do anything that He does not enable you to accomplish! God's commandments come prepackaged with His indwelling Spirit!

- **1 John 5:4-5** – *“For everyone who has been born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world – our faith. Who is it that overcomes the world except the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?”*

John has just spoken of God's commandments as not burdensome and now explains why they are not burdensome. Obedience enables the saint to overcome the world. In fact, it is the world without God that is burdensome.

“I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world.” ([John 16:33](#), ESV)

Your faith results in victory, and you grow in faith as you grow in love. The more you trust someone, the easier it is to love them. Conversely, the more you love someone, the easier it is to trust them. The more perfected your love for Christ is, the more perfected your faith in Christ is too; because faith and love mature together.

Faith in Jesus conquers the world. The world holds you in bondage by the power of its desires. The new birth opens your eyes to see the superior desirability of Jesus.

It is not just a past overcoming that John is thinking of, but also a present overcoming through a continuing and persevering faith in Jesus Christ. This is the same sense in which the word is used in Christ's messages to the seven churches of Asia Minor in Revelation, where the phrase *‘to him who overcomes’* occurs seven times.

“The one who overcomes, I will grant to him to sit with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat with My Father on His throne.” ([Revelation 3:21](#), NASB)

- **1 John 5:6** – *“This is he who came by water and blood – Jesus Christ; not by the water only but by the water and the blood. And the Spirit is the one who*

testifies, because the Spirit is the truth."

John has just mentioned "*Jesus the Son of God*" ([1 John 5:5](#)) and now describes the historical appearance of Jesus Christ in this next section ([1 John 5:6-9](#)). Recall that the major point of attack by the anti-Christ (as it is in EVERY cult!) is on the Person of Jesus Christ, fully God, fully man.

John uses the combination "Jesus" and "Christ [Messiah]" together to designate one individual. This refutes the Gnostic heresy that Jesus was the person, only human, not deity, and that the Christ or divine element came upon Him at His baptism and left Him before His death on the Cross.

John is saying that the eternal Son of God is the same person with the historical Jesus. He reminds us that Jesus' coming in history was not without clear, irrefutable evidence. Like a good lawyer, he calls two reliable witnesses, named "*water*" and "*blood*," to the stand.

➤ **1 John 5:7-8 – "*For there are three that testify: the Spirit and the water and the blood; and these three agree.*"**

John's teaching on the three witnesses (Spirit, water, and blood) state that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.

The oldest and most natural view understands "*Spirit and the water*" as a reference to Christ's baptism, with the attendant witnesses to His identity, the commencement of His ministry ([Matthew 3:13-17](#); [Mark 1:9-11](#); [John 1:31-34](#)), and "*blood*" to the consummation of His saving ministry on the cross.

John appears to base his argument on the fact that the validity of personal testimony in the Old Testament refers to a specific number of credible witnesses. The writer of the book of Hebrews alludes to this pattern of writing that:

"Anyone who has set aside the Law of Moses dies without mercy on the evidence [testimony] of two or three witnesses." ([Hebrews 10:28](#), ESV)

Moses declared that "two or three witnesses" were necessary to establish guilt or innocence on criminal charges ([Deuteronomy 19:15](#)). Only on this basis could they sentence a person to death ([Deuteronomy 17:6](#)). Jesus applied the principle of "two or three witnesses" in His instructions for resolving disputes in the church ([Matthew 18:15-16](#)). Paul also used this standard to sustain and accusation against an elder ([1 Timothy 5:19](#)). In his second letter to the Corinthians, Paul sees his thrice repeated testimony alone, whether in person or by letter, as satisfying the requirement of two or three witnesses" ([2 Corinthians 13:1-3](#)).

John wasn't relaying some inner, subjective vision or philosophy. *Water* and the *blood* make up the external, objective witnesses to who Jesus Christ is. He was telling about his objective experience with Jesus Christ. You can't get much more objective than seeing, hearing, and touching! Jesus Christ is God's witness to us through the apostles who spent three years with Him.

➤ **1 John 5:9 – "*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.*"**

The importance of this verse is that it declares explicitly what has so far only been hinted, namely that God is the subject and Christ is the object of the threefold testimony. It is the testimony of God, which he has given about his Son.

Since we are in the habit of accepting as valid and reliable the testimony of men (we do it in trials in the court of law for example), how much more should we accept the greater testimony of God regarding the truth about His Son, Jesus Christ! The Spirit, water, and blood are God's witness concerning His Son. Jesus' self-witness would not validate his claims; according to the

law, he required the witness of another. That other witness was his Father. The Father gave direct witness to his Son's identity at Jesus' baptism ([Matthew 3:17](#)), transfiguration ([Matthew 17:5](#)), and resurrection ([Romans 1:3–4](#)).

Some writers think that the phrase “*testimony of men*” possibly is a reference to Jesus’ statement about John the Baptist’s testimony. Jesus says:

“There is another [referring to John the Baptist] who bears witness of me, and I know that the testimony which He bears of me is true.” ([John 5:32](#), ESV)

- **1 John 5:10** – *“Whoever believes in the Son of God has the testimony in himself. 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 believe in Jesus as the Son of God, you have the testimony in yourself. John is referring to the *inner witness* of the Spirit to the truth regarding Jesus Christ. When you believe the testimony about Christ, it is because God has changed your heart. You have become a new creature in Him ([2 Corinthians 5:17](#)). You were dead in your sins ([Ephesians 2:1](#)), but now you are alive to God in Christ ([Ephesians 2:4-5](#)). You were blind to the truth of God’s Word, but now you see ([2 Corinthians 4:4-6](#)). You were a rebellious God-hater, but now you are an obedient God-lover. When you believe, you have this inner witness in yourself ([Romans 8:16](#)).

The *external witness* is the objective testimony of the New Testament, through the apostles, to the life, ministry, death, and resurrection of the Lord Jesus. That is the primary foundation that shows that Christianity is not merely psychological.

To *believe in* Jesus Christ is not simply to accept what he says as true; it is to commit yourselves into His hands for time and for eternity. When you do that, the Holy Spirit within you testifies you are acting aright. It is the Holy Spirit who gives you the conviction of the ultimate value of Jesus Christ and assures you are right to make this act of commitment to Him. If you refuse to do that, you are refusing the promptings of the Holy Spirit within your hearts and making God a liar.

There is no room for ignorance or misconception. To reject the witness is to deny the truthfulness of God. That is how clearly the Bible draws the line between faith in Jesus and unbelief. He has spoken and acted deliberately, and with absolute clearness. The testimony has been given ([1 John 5:6-8](#)). These things were not done in a corner. You must either accept or reject the witness must. You cannot ignore or explain it away.

- **1 John 5:11** – *“And this is the testimony, that God gave us eternal life, and this life is in his Son.”*

In the previous verse, John just states how serious the matter of receiving the testimony of God is. Now he will tell us what this testimony is. He reveals God’s testimony concerning the **benefit** made available to believers through him. The testimony is crucial because in the receipt or rejection of it hangs the reception or failure to receive *eternal life*.

Eternal life is a qualitatively brand new life ([2 Corinthians 5:17](#)) and quantitatively a life forever with the Triune God. Life (Greek: [zoe](#)) describes the absolute fullness of life, both essential and ethical, which alone belongs to God, the Giver of life. You find a truly meaningful life, a life that really is worthwhile, only in “*the promise of life in Christ Jesus*” ([2 Timothy 1:1](#)). Jesus came that you might “*have life and might have it abundantly*” ([John 10:10](#)). *Eternal life* is the life of the Lord Jesus Himself. It is a life capable of both enjoying the things of God down here, but especially the only life that will be suitable to enter and enjoy the grace of God forever in heaven.

The consequences of believing God's truth or denying it could hardly be more important or far-reaching. John is not merely concerned about academic disagreements over theological niceties. Eternal destinies are at stake.

➤ **1 John 5:12** – *“Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life.”*

Having the Son is the result or effect (or gift) resulting from believing, accepting, and receiving the testimony of God concerning His Son. The life is in the Son and there is no true (meaningful) life outside of the Son. All humanity is living now in the condition of spiritual life (in Christ) or spiritual death (in Adam) ([Romans 5:12-19](#)). There is no middle ground and no plan B.

Holding to biblical faith means possessing Christ himself, as well as the life the Father grants to those who trust his Son as Lord and Savior. You do not earn or merit eternal life; it is a gift that is given by God to those who have the Son. Ultimately, what matters is our relationship to the Son. Those who have the Son of God living in them have eternal life now — not life someday, not life later, not conditional life, but eternal life, now.

The most important question in the world is the one Jesus asked His disciples:

“Who do you say that I am?” ([Matthew 16:15](#), ESV)

Peter's answer, inspired by God, is the only correct one.

“You are the Christ (Messiah), the Son of the living God.” ([Matthew 16:16](#), ESV)

Do you believe this testimony that God has given about His Son? If so, you have eternal life. If not, you do not have the life and you will perish if you do not repent and believe!

1 John Commentary – Precept Austin

https://www.preceptaustin.org/1_john_51_commentary

COMPARISON OF THOUGHT AND STYLE IN JOHN'S GOSPEL AND FIRST EPISTLE		
First Epistle of John		Gospel of John
1 John 5:1	Born of God	John 1:13