

## A Faith that Overcomes

1 John 5:1-5

Today, we are looking at the first five verses of chapter 5. In this passage John continues to focus on the central themes of faith, love, obedience. As Steve mentioned last week, John continues to add depth and nuance to these topics and that is certainly true in our passage. John will talk about (1) faith and love, (2) love and obedience, and then (3) overcoming and faith. And so, faith is what bookends this passage. Ultimately, we are going to see that we have a faith that overcomes.

And so, first John talks about faith and love.

### I. Faith and Love (v. 1)

*<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.*

If you believe, and keep believing, that *Jesus is the Christ*, in other words that He is the One who came into the world to die on the cross for your sins and to rise from the dead, that is proof that you have been *born of God*. It is confirming evidence that God, through the work of His Spirit in you, has made you alive spiritually.

In the second part of the verse, John says that everyone who *loves the Father* will also love *whoever has been born of him*. It could literally be translated, “everyone who loves the one who begets also loves the one begotten of him.”

Over the years there are all sorts of men whom I’ve gotten to know here at Faith, whether its Greg, or Nathan, or Eric, or Josh. Some started their family when they lived here and others after they moved. In many cases I really don’t know their children because they were really young when they moved. But here’s the thing, because of my relationship with Greg, or Nathan, or Eric, I love their children. My love for the children is based on my love for the father. This is what John is saying, if we love the Father, we will also love the Father’s children.

Now, John has made it clear a number of times that if we have been born of God we will love one another. It’s a command and it characterizes those who truly know God. But John says it here in a way that focuses the love command. If I think about the love command in general terms it is easier for me to say, “Sure I love other believers,” but the way John says it here points to thinking more specifically. If I love the Father, I will love the child born of God. In other words, I will love EACH child born of God.

Do you love each one born of God? Or do you allow yourself to think that since you love most that surely that is good enough? John doesn’t say, “It’s enough to love most. It’s enough to love those who are like you. It’s enough to love those with whom you naturally connect. It’s enough to love those who agree with you on all matters of theology, or on politics, or whatever.” John

isn't saying any of this! If we pick and choose whom we love based on these kinds of things, we are not exhibiting the kind of love that demonstrates that we love the Father. We are to love each one born of God.

I'm sure for most of us, we can think of someone that we have given ourselves an out on loving because of conflict we've had or the differences between us. We've decided it just isn't worth the effort to love them. But I don't see that John gives us that option. And so, here's what I'd encourage you to do. Just start praying for that person. Pray that God would bless that person. And then seek to walk in love towards that person. Love, we are told in 1 Corinthians 13, is patient and kind, it isn't arrogant or rude, it does not insist on its own way (1 Cor. 13:4ff). If we love the Father, this is how we will seek to treat each one born of God.

Now, in verse 2 John goes on to talk love and obedience. He says that it is through these things that we can know if we love those born of God.

## II. Love and Obedience (vv. 2-3)

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

John does something unusual here. Typically, he says something to the effect that the way we test our claim to love God is by whether we love his children. But here he reverses the order, and he says that the way we test our love for *the children of God*, is by whether *we love God and obey his commandments*.

In changing the order, John is demonstrating how love for God and love for the children of God are impossible to separate. It is impossible to love God without loving his children, and it is impossible to love His children without loving God. They go together. Further, John says that we know that we love the children of God when we obey God's commandments. To love God and to keep his commandments are also inseparable. And so, if we love God and if we obey Him, we also know that we love the children of God especially since one of God's commands is that we love one another.

Verse 3:

*<sup>3</sup>For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments. And his commandments are not burdensome.*

If we love God, we will obey him. We will *keep his commandments*. As we've said before, we are all in process. None of us obeys God's commandments perfectly, but if we love Him this will be demonstrated by a desire to obey and a growing expression of obeying his commandments, which John says *are not burdensome*. God's commandments, including the love command, are not burdensome. They are not too much. They are not oppressive or severe. They are not irksome.

Do you ever feel like God's commands are burdensome? John is not saying that God's commands are necessarily easy. Some are very difficult, but they are not burdensome. If we think they are, we are not rightly understanding God's commands. Jesus said it this way in Matthew 11:

*28 Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. 29 Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. 30 For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."*

Jesus is calling us to a life of discipleship, of learning how to live life his way. That's what the yoke is all about. But he says his yoke is not burdensome; it is light. Do you see the commands of God this way?

Before we move on, I want to address a couple of specific groups, because I think this idea that God's commands are burdensome is a very real issue for some of us. And so, first if you have **not yet come to the point in your life where you have trusted in Jesus** to be your Savior, you might look at God's commands as too much.

I've known people, as they are wrestling with submitting to Jesus and becoming a follower of his, who have held back from doing so because they didn't think they can do what God asks. The commands seem to be too much. Here's the deal, until you are born of God, they will be too much. But once you trust in Jesus, God imparts spiritual life to you. You are born of God. And His Spirit comes to live within you equipping you with new desires and ability to obey. And what now looks impossible, becomes possible because of God's life in you.

Secondly, let me say a word **to younger people**. Maybe you are growing up with parents who follow Jesus, but as you are getting older and trying to figure out what you want for your life, you are unsure which way you want to go. You look at choices that some of your friends are making to experience what the world has to offer and it looks so enticing and fun. And you are wondering if going that way might give you a better life than following Jesus. Some of God's commands just look so hard. They look like they are going to rob you of fun and excitement.

Here's my encouragement to you. All around you are people who have walked with God for a long time. They have tested these things. And from the vantage point of age and experience, they will tell you that though it has been hard at times to follow Jesus, they do not regret obeying God's commands. They will tell you that they have experienced what Psalm 19 affirms:

*7 The law of the LORD is perfect, reviving the soul;  
the testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple;  
8 the precepts of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart;  
the commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes;  
9 the fear of the LORD is clean, enduring forever;  
the rules of the LORD are true, and righteous altogether.  
10 More to be desired are they than gold, even much fine gold;*

*sweeter also than honey and drippings of the honeycomb.*  
<sup>11</sup> *Moreover, by them is your servant warned;  
in keeping them there is great reward.*

They have found that God's commands are not burdensome but something that has given them the life and joy and wisdom and reward that Psalm 19 talks about. And so, my encouragement to you is to let the experience of those who are farther down the road on a journey with God motivate you to choose to start or to keep following Jesus.

Finally, let me say this to **any who might be struggling** with thinking that God's commands are burdensome. One of the passages I've often turned to as I've reflected on some aspect of obedience is Romans 12:2, which says this:

<sup>2</sup> *Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.*

God's will, His commandments, are *good and acceptable and perfect*. That word, *acceptable*, means "well-pleasing." When you obey God's commands, you will find that no matter how hard it is, it will be well-pleasing. You will find joy on the other side of obedience. I haven't traveled this road as long as some in this room, but I have been a Christian for over 50 years, and I can honestly say that there has never been a time that I've regretted obeying God. Not one time!

And so, whether you are hesitant to submit your life to Jesus, or you are a younger person wondering if following Jesus is worth it, or if you are just anyone who is thinking that obeying God in some area of life just seems too hard; that the sacrifice is too much, let me say this as clearly as I can: God's commandments are not burdensome. Everything He commands is for your good and you will find joy on the other side of obedience.

And so, in talking about love and obedience, John tells us that God's commands are not burdensome because of the nature of them. As he goes on, he also wants us to understand that they are not burdensome because of what is true of us. As we come to verse 4 John talks about overcoming and faith.

### III. **Overcoming and Faith** (vv. 4-5)

<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.*

Part of what makes obeying God's commandments hard is *the world*, which is everything opposed to God. It's the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the boastful pride of life that John talked about in 2:16. It is attitudes and values opposed to God. But John says that everyone who has been born of God *overcomes the world*. *Overcomes* has the sense of victory. It is a

victory that is rooted in what Jesus has already accomplished (John 16:33) and which we personally realize through *our faith*. And the nature of this faith is made clear in the next verse.

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

The faith that John is talking about is faith in Jesus as the Son of God. When anyone comes to faith in Jesus, they are born again, and God begins to transform our desires and tendencies. Where once we followed the ways of the world, now God transforms our desires to conform to His, and what once was hard we are now empowered to do.

Here's something important that I want each of you to hear regarding what John is saying. He is not describing a special class of believers. He is not saying there are some who are overcomers and some who are not. He is saying that "overcomer" is the name for everyone who has expressed faith in Jesus and is therefore born of God. If you have expressed faith in Jesus, you are an overcomer.

Yes, you may be struggling in some ways right now. You may not feel like an overcomer right now, but this is who you are in Christ. And so, I would encourage you to meditate on this truth. You do have a faith that overcomes. This is your destiny in Christ.

Today, as we come to the Lord's Table, we remember the basis of our overcoming faith. Jesus died for our sins. Jesus rose from the dead that we might walk in newness of life. When we, by faith believed these things, we were born of God and God's Spirit came to live within us. Our overcoming faith is based on the victory that Jesus accomplished through his death and resurrection. And so in these moments meditate on these truths. Invite him to help you walk in the victory and live out a faith of love and obedience.