

## Be Sure: Confident Living from 1 John

That You Overcome

1 John 5:1-12

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<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 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? <sup>6</sup> 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. <sup>7</sup> For there are three that testify: <sup>8</sup> the Spirit and the water and the blood; and these three agree. <sup>9</sup> 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. <sup>10</sup> 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. <sup>11</sup> And this is the testimony, that God gave us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. <sup>12</sup> Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life. 1 John 5:1–12 (ESV)

For the last eight weeks we've been discovering what the book of 1 John says about the issue of assurance. John's aim has been to help people know some important truths about their spiritual lives. He wants believers in Jesus to know what they believe so that they can endure.

We started this series on Easter Sunday, and we talked about where spiritual assurance begins: knowing that you have eternal life. This series began with 1 John 5:13.

<sup>13</sup> I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life (1 John 5:13).

From there we looked at a number of other important ideas connected to assurance, including what it means to belong, the role of confession and forgiveness, being sure that belief works, not loving the wrong things, understanding how salvation transforms you, and (last week) the priority of loving others.

These messages have been designed to strengthen your spiritual confidence if you are Christian and to help those of you who are not yet Christians know what it means to become a follower of Jesus.

Next week will be a special Sunday, as we'll hear from two of our Pastoral Residents in first and third services. And during the second service, we'll hear from Zach Cochran who was interviewed by our Elders for our Student Ministries position.

During the months of June and July, we are going to take nine weeks to explore the attributes of God. We hope to help you understand how the Bible describes what God is like. We will walk through an expositional study of various texts that help us get a more complete picture of the character, essence, and actions of God. Our aim is to have you know what God is like so you can love Him and the gospel even more.

We'll have some excellent books available about what God is like. I hope that you'll use your summer for some intentional reading. I'd love for you to be sitting on some beach, thinking about what God is like and reflecting on His beauty and grace.

### **Final Thought from 1 John**

As we wrap up our study of this wonderful book, there is one final thought that I would like for us to unpack. You could think of this as a statement that not only serves as a summary of 1 John, but also as a directional theme or motto as we move beyond this book. Here's the final thought:

#### **Christians are overcomers who live by obedience and belief**

This statement is important because it speaks to a Christian's identity and what he or she is called to do. Spiritual confidence always involves position and practice. Assurance for the Christian comes by knowing who you are and how your life has been practically changed. Being and doing are vital to the assurance that your relationship with Christ is legitimate.

For those of you who are not yet Christians, this being/doing thought may help you to understand your need to come to Jesus. The miracle of the gospel is the way it transforms both your identity—who you are and how you think about yourself—and the way it changes what you do.

For Christians, being an overcomer who lives by obedience and belief is the framework for future living. In other words, it is not only how you look back at assurance, but it is also how you look forward.

Many of you have heard me talk about my personal priorities that sound like this: I want to be God's kind of person, partner, parent, and pastor. And in that order. I can remember a time when Sarah and I fearfully anticipated the birth of our twins in 1996. The dynamics at our church were complicated, the Senior Pastor was leaving, and our future was incredibly uncertain. In one of those moments when we were battling anxiety, I remember saying to Sarah, "I don't know how this is going to turn out, but what I do know is that I'm going to be God's kind of person, partner, parent, and pastor. That doesn't change."

And I don't know about you, but I need those kinds of statements. They help center me, encourage me, and direct me. If you are a Christian, and you are facing some level of uncertainty or challenge that is coming your way, this is how you endure. You remind yourself that through Jesus Christ, you are an overcomer and that you are called to live by belief and obedience.

This is the final thought from 1 John, but it will hopefully serve to carry you forward, regardless of what comes your way.

## What it Means to be an Overcomer?

In order to unpack 1 John 5:1-12, I want to start in the middle of the text. John is not like the apostle Paul, with his logical and linear argument. He's much more cyclical in how he communicates. That's why I want to begin in verses 4-5 because they feature the repetition of the word "overcome" three times.

*<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 5:4–5).*

Let's start with a basic definition. The Greek word means to win a victory over someone or something. It is to be considered a conqueror.<sup>1</sup> If you are a sports fan or an athlete, it is the idea of winning the championship, complete with the trophy, the banner, the retired jersey, and the ring. If you went to a graduation ceremony, it is the moving of the tassel or the designation "with honor" because of your GPA. If you are a history buff, it is the parade down Fifth Avenue in New York City in 1946 after WWII.

For the Christian, this status is connected to Christ's victory over sin and death. Let me give you a few examples:

*<sup>33</sup> 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)*

*<sup>57</sup> But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 15:57)*

Christians are considered victorious, and they are called overcomers because of the work of Jesus on their behalf. Through His death and resurrection, Jesus was victorious over sin and death. And His victory becomes the victory of all those who believe in Him. Christians share in the conqueror status of Christ.

The life and the victory of Christ lives in those who find their lives in Jesus.

*<sup>4</sup> Little children, you are from God and have overcome them, for he who is in you is greater than he who is in the world (1 John 4:4).*

To be an overcomer means that a Christian understands the reality of who he or she is in light of who Jesus is. To be an overcomer is to believe what the Bible says about you. To be an overcomer means to believe that through Christ you are victorious. His victory over sin, death, and temptation belong to us.

Now, according to 1 John 5:4-5, being an overcomer means three things:

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<sup>1</sup> Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1996), 500.

**Being born again:** This is the eighth and final time John talks about being born again.<sup>2</sup> This term refers to the supernatural change that takes place in the life of a believer when a person puts his faith in Jesus. But what you need to see here in verse 4 is the way it is connected to overcoming the world. John's point is to link the miracle of the new birth to the continual supernatural power to overcome the destructive elements of the world.

As we learned a few weeks ago, the world's system is broken, with the desires of the flesh, the desires of the eyes, and the pride of life (1 John 2:16). And John's point here is simply that those who have been born again are able to continually overcome what is wrong with the world and with the remaining influence of the world in them. The new birth makes them overcomers.

If you were here last week, you'll remember that I connected wetness and water to love and who God is. Well, here is a similar idea. Believers are overcomers such that overcomers prove they are believers. Assurance does not merely come from a date in your Bible where you made a decision for Christ. True assurance comes from seeing the "overcoming nature" that now lives within you.

This is why Paul can say the following in Galatians 5:19, 24 –

*<sup>19</sup> Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, <sup>20</sup> idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, <sup>21</sup> envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God... <sup>24</sup> And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. (Galatians 5:19–21, 24)*

To be born again means that you have crucified the flesh. It means that you are an overcomer. To be born again is to be an overcomer.

But Christian, is that how you think about yourself? Do you see yourself as a new person? Have you believed the lies of the flesh, the devil, and the world? You may have even come to the place where you think you ARE your sin. But the Bible offers hope to you that you can be defined in a different way and live a different life.

**Our Faith:** The next phrase in verse 4 serves to clarify how this status of being an overcomer came to be. It's as if John anticipates some questioning of what kind of victory he means. After all, if you look around, it might seem as if the victory is not so victorious. So, John points to the issue of faith. He says "this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith."

Interestingly, this is the only time that John uses the word faith in this letter. And in this context, it is less about what is happening inside of us than it is about the substance of what is believed. In other words, overcomers are overcomers because of what they believe. They believe in the faith once delivered (Jude 1:3). And they continue to be built up in him, established in the faith (Col. 2:6-7).

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<sup>2</sup> Daniel L. Akin, *1, 2, 3 John*, vol. 38, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2001), 192.

It is *this* faith—*our* faith—that has overcome the world. What we sing about, talk about, write about, and talk about when it comes to *the* faith has the power to overcome the world. The key to overcoming is understanding that overcoming is linked to a body of truth that we believe.

**Trusting in Jesus:** All of this talk makes it sound like we are overcomers by our own strength, but nothing could be further from the truth. John makes this very practical and personal through the use of a question in verse 5.

No one overcomes on their own. They overcome because they believe in Jesus. More specifically, they believe He really is the Son of God. Overcomers overcome because of their belief in who Jesus is. Overcomers do not trust in themselves. They trust in Jesus.

Everything about their lives in the past, everything about their lives in the present, and everything about their hope in the future is based upon belief in Jesus. Overcoming began in the past because of what Jesus did. Overcoming will ultimately be completed by Jesus in the future. And overcoming right now takes place because of who Jesus is.

Friends, the key to being an overcomer is never letting go of Jesus. And the hope of being an overcomer is the fact that Jesus never lets go of you.

Christian, did you need to be reminded today that you are an overcomer? Perhaps you've found yourself discouraged by the presence of sin, death, and temptation around you. Perhaps you've not spent enough time considering who Jesus is.

Perhaps you've allowed the subtle lies of your flesh or the devil to dominate your thinking this week. Turn to Jesus again. Look to Him!

### **The Call to Obey and Believe**

Now that we've defined what it means to be an overcomer, let's look around verses 4-5 to see how assurance is connected to both obedience and belief. Both of these are critical to the life of a Christian.

#### **Obedience**

In 5:1 John states a principle linking believing in Jesus, being born of God, loving the Father, and loving others. Once again, we see the interconnectedness between what you believe and how you love. Loving the Father and loving others is a critical part of what it means to be those who have overcome the world.

Verse 2 seems to be a bit odd, but this is the way John writes. He keeps reversing things in order to emphasize his points. The verse connects loving other people by how we love God and keep His commandments. It is true that we love God by loving others. But it is also true that we love others by loving God and keeping His commandments.

You know this to be true if you are in close relationship with someone. Whether it is a dear friend, a child, or a spouse, is it not true that if that person refuses to love God and keep His commandments it

breaks your heart? Our actions affect other people. Loving God and obeying His commands is one of the ways that we love one another.

And in verse 3 John reiterates that the love of God is expressed by keeping His commandments. But what does it mean that His commandments are not burdensome? John is saying that Jesus' commands are not crushing, unreasonable, or oppressive. The standards of the Bible are high, but God provides the grace Christians need in order to obey.<sup>3</sup> What's more, obeying these commands comes from a heart that loves God. And when love is the motivator, obedience and service are a delight, not drudgery.

A Christian's love for God is more than an emotional feeling. Love for God certainly involves your emotions, but it also involves your morals. Obedience is a proof that your love for God is genuine. Morality validates theology.

### **Belief**

The other aspect of being an overcomer is what you believe. We saw this in verse 5, but verses 6-12 expand on this even further by talking about the testimony about Jesus that we've come to believe. John's aim here is to remind us that there is good reason to believe in Jesus.

Verse 6 can seem to be a bit obscure because it is not entirely clear what John means by "water and blood" as it relates to the witness about Christ. There are a number of views. Some take this as referring to Jesus' birth, some to the Lord's supper, and some to the moment when Jesus was pierced. But I think it is most likely referring to the two signature events in Jesus' ministry: His baptism and His death. These were major events that confirmed that Jesus was the son of God.

In His baptism, Jesus identified himself with sinful humanity, and in His death, He took on our penalty. This is what we believe.

And verse 6 further points to the work of the Spirit in confirming the testimony about Jesus. It is the Holy Spirit who speaks the truth about who Jesus is. Both the water, the blood, and the Spirit all agree together (vv. 7-8).

Verses 9-10 seek to compare the testimony of men with the testimony of God. John says that if we believe the testimony of mere men, why would we not believe the testimony of God about His son? John presses the issue even further by saying that if we don't believe what God has said about His son, we make Him (or believe Him to be) a liar—which is a very serious charge.

His point is this: Believers are marked by believing.

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<sup>3</sup> Daniel L. Akin, *1, 2, 3 John*, vol. 38, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2001), 191.

They believe what God has said. That is how they become overcomers and how they continue to be overcomers. They believe. And what do they believe? Here is the gospel in two verses:

*<sup>11</sup> And this is the testimony, that God gave us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. <sup>12</sup> Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life. (1 John 5:11–12)*

You see, you become a Christian by believing. But you endure to the end by believing as well. You keep affirming the truths that you already believe.

What are Christians like? What keeps them persevering all the way to the end? It is the hopeful truth that they are overcomers who live out their spiritual status by obedience and faith.

Where does God find you today? Are you battling a doubting heart? Did you lose the battle with temptation last week? Are you fearful of some trial that awaits you or perhaps you are in the middle of it? Can I just remind you that—

*In Christ alone, my hope is found  
He is my light, my strength, my song  
This Cornerstone, this solid Ground,  
Firm through the fiercest drought and storm.  
What heights of love, what depths of peace,  
When fears are stilled, when strivings cease!  
My comforter, my All in All,  
Here in the love of Christ I stand.*

You stand as an overcomer! And by obedience and belief, we stand on the solid rock of Jesus Christ. Our assurance and our hope rest in Him.

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