

24. The Epistle of 1 John—5:1-6

(12/18/19)

1 John 5:1-3 (NKJV)

¹ Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God, and everyone who loves Him who begot also loves him who is begotten of Him. ² By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and keep His commandments. ³ For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments. And His commandments are not burdensome.

As we come to 1John chapter 5—John is starting to wrap things up.

In the first 3 verses he, one more time (a good teacher uses repetition to drive his or her points into their students minds and hearts), gives to us the test or criteria for genuine faith.

He starts out by telling us that those with saving faith, first of all, believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God.

Then he tells us that those who are really children of God love the Father and the Son—and that true faith loves both the same because They (along with the Spirit) are one and the same God.

Building on that, John then proceeds to tell us that, true children of God not only love the Father and the Son—they will always love other Christians (not just those in their particular denomination or group) since all Christians are members of the family of God, and the same Spirit binds us all together as one Body.

He ends by saying that the final mark of a true Christian is that they prove they know and love God by keeping (or seriously trying to keep) His commandments—to which he adds, “**And His commandments are not burdensome.**” (v.3)

Now by saying this John could be saying one of two things—or both.

First of all, that keeping God's commandments are not a burden for true children of God because God the Spirit lives in us and has written the commandments of God in our hearts—and therefore keeping God's commandments are a joy and not a burden.

But secondly, John could be saying that God's commandments are not a heavy burden for God's children to bear because—the Holy Spirit lives inside of us and gives us the power to obey all that God has commanded!

Now, I think when John said this, he had in mind (at least in part) the Judaizers and others that were still trying to lay the heavy burden of the law on people for salvation—a practice that Jesus condemned during His earthly ministry:

Luke 11:46 (NKJV)

⁴⁶ ..."Woe to you also, lawyers! For you load men with burdens hard to bear [many laws and regulations], and you yourselves do not touch the burdens with one of your fingers.

As we have said in earlier studies—the Law of God given to Moses contained 613 commandments—so many that most Jews gave up even trying to remember them all let alone keep them.

And then when you realized that the rabbis added pages and pages of further regulations and rules that related to the keeping of each of the 613 main laws (the Sabbath alone contained 24 chapters in the Talmud being devoted to the concept of what constituted Sabbath rest)—you begin to realize what a burden it was for the Jewish people to try to keep God's commandments!

So, to make it easier, the experts of the Law (lawyers) divided the commandments into “*heavy*” (important) and “*light*” (unimportant).

And they taught that a person could major on the “*heavy commandments*” and not worry about the trivial ones—not unlike the mentality toward sin we see today! (Explain)

The fallacy behind this approach is obvious: You need only break *one law*, heavy or light, to be guilty before God—“*For whosoever shall keep the whole Law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all*” (James 2:10).

Now, in Jesus’ day, the running debate among the scholars of the Law was—which one of the 613 was the greatest commandment of them all!

This was a question that the Pharisees eventually posed to Jesus—

Matthew 22:36-40 (NKJV)

³⁶ "Teacher, which *is* the great commandment in the law?" ³⁷ Jesus said to him, "*You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.*" ³⁸ This is the first and great commandment. ³⁹ And *the second is* like it: '*You shall love your neighbor as yourself.*' ⁴⁰ On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets."

And so, Jesus took 613 commandments and condensed them down to just 2—which in and of itself took much of the burden of the law away and made keeping just 2 commandments much easier to remember—and easier to keep!

Some believe that’s what Jesus meant when He said—

Matthew 11:28-30 (NKJV)

²⁸ Come to Me, all *you* 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."

However, I believe that Jesus was not talking about how He reduced 613 commandments down to 2 and that was why His yoke was easy—I believe He was contrasting the old covenant of law under Moses with the new covenant of grace which He came to bring—and that was “His yoke”.

His yoke is easy because, in the new covenant a person simply has to believe in Jesus for salvation—there are no laws that must be kept for God to declare them righteous. (Elaborate)

Paul the apostle spoke of this when he said—

Romans 3:21-22 (NKJV)

²¹ But now the righteousness of God apart from the law is revealed, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, ²² even the righteousness of God, through faith in Jesus Christ, to all and on all who believe. For there is no difference;

As Christians, we don't keep God's commandments for salvation—we keep them because, as redeemed people with a new nature,—we love the commandments of God.

As Paul said, “*For I delight in the law of God according to the inward man.*” (Romans 7:22)

But secondly, we keep God's commandments because it pleases the heart of our Father in heaven and demonstrates to the people of this world that we are His children (in the hope that they will be drawn to our light for salvation!).

1 John 5:4 (NKJV)

⁴ For whatever is born of God overcomes the world...

Let me stop for a minute and talk briefly about *overcomers* and *overcoming the world*.

As you know, John the apostle wrote both 1John and the Book of Revelation—and in both he mentions overcomers.

But it's his comments on overcomers in Revelation has caused a great deal stress, anxiety and handwringing over the years by those believers who struggle with different sins—for example:

Revelation 2:26 (NKJV)

²⁶ And he who overcomes, and keeps My works until the end, to him I will give power over the nations--

Revelation 3:5 (NKJV)

⁵ He who overcomes shall be clothed in white garments, and I will not blot out his name from

the Book of Life; but I will confess his name before My Father and before His angels.

Revelation 3:12 (NKJV)

¹² He who overcomes, I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God, and he shall go out no more. And I will write on him the name of My God and the name of the city of My God, the New Jerusalem, which comes down out of heaven from My God. And *I will write on him* My new name.

Revelation 21:7 (NKJV)

⁷ He who overcomes shall inherit all things, and I will be his God [*the Father is speaking*] and he shall be My son.

In all of those passages, John is recording the words of Jesus and the Father who both seem to be saying that overcoming the world is essential for living with God in heaven.

And again, that terrifies those who haven't overcome their flesh when it comes to things like alcohol, drugs, pornography and the world in general—as in those who still love the world (worldliness).

And didn't John say that if someone loves the world, the love of the Father isn't in them? (1John 2:15)

These people interpret the words of Jesus and the Father concerning overcoming as being essential for entrance into heaven—but that would make eternal life and heaven a reward to be earned and not a gift to be received.

All we need to solve this somewhat terrifying dilemma is to keep on reading in 1John 5:4-5:

1 John 5:4-5 (NKJV)

⁴ For whatever is born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world--our faith. ⁵ Who is he who overcomes the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?

When it comes to interpreting Scripture—study carefully the context and compare Scripture with Scripture.

Look, victory over the 3 powerful enemies that we face on a daily basis (the world, the flesh and the devil) begins when we put our faith in Jesus (saving faith) and are born again (John 3:3, 7).

At that instant, the Holy Spirit moves in, gives us the nature of God and the power we need to be victorious—but faith doesn't end there.

If we want to walk in *practical* victory over the 3 enemies, we just mentioned every day—that takes continual faith (a daily walk of faith) in Jesus to live His life thru us thru the power of the Holy Spirit living inside of us—

Galatians 2:20 (NKJV)

²⁰ I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the *life* which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.

Three times in the N.T. (Rom.1:17; Gal.3:11; Heb.10:38)—Paul tells us, "*The just shall live by faith*" quoting from Hab.2:4

A word of caution—the kind of faith that John says saves and overcomes the world isn't mere '*head-knowledge*' or what we call '*passive faith in facts*'.

It's the kind of faith that Spurgeon admonished us to understand when he said—

*"Look at any Greek lexicon you like, and you will find that the word [faith or believe] does not merely mean to **believe**, but to trust, to confide in, to commit to, entrust with, and so forth; the very marrow of the meaning of faith is confidence in, [and] reliance upon."*

Of course, faith and the Word of God go hand in hand when it comes to victory over the enemy—

1 John 2:14b (NKJV)

¹⁴ ...I have written to you, young men, because you are strong, and the word of God abides in you, And you have overcome the wicked one.

Psalm 119:11 (NKJV)

¹¹ Your word I have hidden in my heart, That I might not sin against You!

1 John 5:6-8 (NKJV)

⁶ This is He who came by water and blood--Jesus Christ; not only by water, but by water and blood. And it is the Spirit who bears witness, because the Spirit is truth. ⁷ For there are three that bear witness in heaven: the Father, the Word, and the Holy Spirit; and these three are one. ⁸ And there are three that bear witness on earth: the Spirit, the water, and the blood; and these three agree as one.

These verses contain some of the most controversial and hotly debated Scriptures that you will find in the New Testament—leading to a variety of interpretations.

Let's start looking at this passage tonight and then come back after the 1st of the year to finish it.

Understand first of all what John is presenting in these verses and why.

He is telling us how we can know that Jesus is really the Son of God and Savior of the world—based on the testimony of 3 powerful witnesses.

Before we look at what they are—why did John feel the need to bring 3 powerful witnesses to the 'stand' to testify and confirm that Jesus was who He claimed to be?

It was because many of the Jewish people still didn't believe that Jesus was their Messiah and Savior—let alone the Son of God!

And the reason for this was because, during His earthly ministry, many (most) of the Jewish religious leaders had rejected Jesus going as far as to claim that He was, at least, a liar, possibly a lunatic (out of His mind) and at worst He was demon possessed!

And so many Jews rejected Jesus because of their leader's rejection of Him.

Even to this day, when you ask an orthodox Jew why he doesn't believe that Jesus was the Jewish Messiah they will tell you—*“If He was the Messiah, our leaders would have recognized Him as the Messiah.”*

Even though Jesus called those leaders *“blind leaders of the blind”*. (Matt.15:14)

And so, John (under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit) wants to call into evidence the testimony of the 3 witnesses that he presents in the closing verses of this epistle—

1 John 5:7-8 (NKJV)

⁷ For there are three that bear witness in heaven: the Father, the Word, and the Holy Spirit; and these three are one. ⁸ And there are three that bear witness on earth: the Spirit, the water, and the blood; and these three agree as one.

Now, if you're reading from any other translation other than the **KJV** or the **NKJV**—your Bible reads, as the **ESV**:

1 John 5:7-8 (ESV)

⁷ For there are three that testify: ⁸ the Spirit and the water and the blood; and these three agree.

What is missing is the end of verse 7 and the beginning of verse 8 which tells us that **“there are 3 that bear witness in heaven—the Father, the Word, and the Holy Spirit; and these three are one.”** ⁸ And there are three that bear witness on earth...”

Next time we'll look at why most of the modern translations of 1John leave out those words.

But for the remainder of our time tonight—let's just focus on the 3 witnesses that all the translations of the N.T. include—starting with verse 6:

1 John 5:6 (NKJV)

⁶ This is He who came by water and blood--Jesus Christ; not only by water, but by water and blood. And it is the Spirit who bears witness, because the Spirit is truth.

There has been a lot of speculation and debate among scholars as to what John was referring to when he talked about how **“the water and the blood”** were witnesses of Jesus Christ being the Son of God.

But even more perplexing, what did John mean when he said that Jesus *“came by water and blood”*!?

As one scholar said, *“This is the most perplexing passage in the Epistle and one of the most perplexing in the New Testament.”*

I’ll give you some of the interpretations that scholars and church leaders down thru the centuries believed John was referring to when he talked about how Jesus **“came by water and blood”**.

One pastor and author summed it up—

1. Some believe that *“water”* speaks of our own baptism, and *“blood”* speaks of receiving communion, and that John writes of how Jesus comes to us in the two Christian sacraments of baptism and communion (Luther and Calvin had this idea). Yet, if this is the case, it doesn’t add up with the historical perspective John had when he wrote *“came by water and blood.”* He seems to write of something that happened in the past, not something that is ongoing [among Christians in the present].
2. Others (such as Augustine) believe the *“water and blood”* describes the water and blood which flowed from Jesus’ side when He was stabbed with a spear on the cross: *‘But one of the soldiers pierced His side with a spear, and immediately blood and water came out’* (John 19:34). This was an important event to the Apostle John because immediately after this description of water and blood, he added in his gospel: *‘And he who has seen has testified, and his testimony is true; and he knows that he is telling the truth, so that you may believe’* (John 19:35). Yet, if this was John’s meaning, it is a little unclear how it can be said that Jesus came by water and blood (or how it proves the deity of Jesus—only that He died on the cross.)
3. Still others believe the *“water”* spoke of Jesus’ physical birth, being born of the *“waters of the womb,”* and *“blood”* speaks of His death. If this is the case, John would be essentially writing, *“Jesus was born like a man and died like a man. He was completely human, not some super-spiritual being who had no real contact with the material world.”*

The Gnostics in John's day thought of Jesus as just such a super-spiritual being. (That would prove His humanity, but not His deity)

Probably the best explanation (though there are good points to some of the other ideas) is the oldest recorded Christian understanding of this passage (first recorded by the ancient Christian Tertullian). Most likely, John means the water of Jesus' baptism, and the blood of His crucifixion.

1. When Jesus was baptized, He was not baptized in repentance for His own sin (He had none), but because He wanted to completely identify with sinful humanity. When He came by water, it was His way of saying, "*I am one of you.*"
2. When Jesus died on the cross, He did not die because He had to (death could have no power over Him), but He laid down His life to identify with sinful humanity and to save us from our sin. When He came by ... blood it was so that He could stand in our place as a guilty sinner, and to take the punishment our sin deserved.

Some back in John's day, taught (and some still teach) that Jesus received the "Christ Spirit" at His baptism, and the "Christ Spirit" left Jesus before He died on the cross (for them, it is unthinkable that God could hang on a cross).

But John insisted that Jesus did not only come by the water of baptism, but also by the blood of the cross. He was just as much the Son of God on the cross as He was when the Father declared, '*You are My beloved Son; in You I am well pleased (Luke 3:22) at the baptism of Jesus.*'"

So again, it's best to see the **water** here as a reference to Christ's *baptism* and the **blood** as a reference to His *death* on the cross—those two notable events bracketed the Lord's earthly ministry, and in both of them the Father testified concerning His Son.