

The Books of 1, 2, and 3 John

Lesson 8: Faith That Overcomes the World -- 1 John 5:1-12

Every one of us is fighting something. A temptation that keeps circling back. A culture whose current runs against everything we believe. A discouragement that whispers it is not worth it, that the world is too strong and we are too weak. John knows the fight is real, and into the middle of it he drops a word that sounds almost too bold to believe: “This is the victory that has overcome the world, our faith.”

Not our willpower. Not our cleverness. Not our track record. Our faith. John says that everyone born of God overcomes the world, and the conquering power is faith in Jesus, the Son of God. The world, with all its pressure and pull, has already met its match, not in our strength but in the One we trust. And John ties it all together in a way that is deeply practical: the one who is born of God loves God, loves God’s children, and keeps His commandments, and finds that these commandments are not burdensome. Love, obedience, and victory turn out to be the same life seen from different angles.

Then John does what a good witness does. He calls witnesses to the stand. He speaks of the water and the blood and the Spirit, all testifying to who Jesus is. He reminds us that God Himself has testified concerning His Son, and that to refuse this testimony is to call God a liar. The case is not built on our feelings or our wishes but on the witness God has given.

And it all comes down to one verdict, stated as plainly as anything in Scripture: “Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life.” There it is. Life is not a vague spiritual quality floating free of Jesus. Life is in His Son, and it is had by having Him. So this passage is about a fight we are actually winning, a faith that actually overcomes, and a life that is found in one place only: in the Son of God.

Group Discussion: John says that our faith is the victory that overcomes the world. What does it mean, in everyday terms, that faith, rather than willpower or self-improvement, is what overcomes the pressures of the world?

Personal Reflection: John says God’s commandments “are not burdensome” to those born of God. Are there commands of God that feel heavy or burdensome to you right now, and what might that reveal about where your faith and love need to grow?

Read 1 John 5:1-12

Study Questions

1. John says, “everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been born of God,” and that such a person loves God and His children and keeps His commandments (vv. 1–2). How does this passage tie together faith, the new birth, love, and obedience as parts of one whole?
2. John writes that God’s commandments “are not burdensome” (v. 3). Be honest about which of God’s commands feel like a burden to you, and consider what it would take for obedience to become a delight rather than a weight.
3. John declares, “this is the victory that has overcome the world, our faith” (v. 4). What does it mean that faith overcomes the world, and why does John locate our victory in faith rather than in our own effort or strength?
4. John speaks of overcoming the world, yet many of us feel defeated by it. Where do you most feel that the world is winning in your life, and how does John’s teaching about faith reframe that struggle?
5. John says the one who overcomes the world is the one “who believes that Jesus is the Son of God” (v. 5). Why is the specific content of our faith, who Jesus is, so essential, and how is this different from a vague faith in faith itself?
6. John appeals to the testimony of the Spirit, the water, and the blood concerning Jesus (vv. 6–8). Where do you tend to look for assurance about Jesus, to your feelings, to your experiences, or to the testimony God has given, and how reliable has each proven to be?
7. John argues that if we receive human testimony, we should all the more receive God’s testimony about His Son, and that to refuse it is to make God a liar (vv. 9–10). What does this teach about the basis of faith, and about the seriousness of refusing God’s witness concerning Jesus?
8. John says that the one who believes “has the testimony in himself” (v. 10). How has God confirmed His witness about Jesus in your own life and heart, and where do you need that inner assurance to grow deeper?
9. John concludes, “Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life” (vv. 11–12). What does this teach about where eternal life is found, and why is it impossible to have life apart from genuinely having the Son?
10. Look back across this passage, from faith that overcomes, to the testimony of God, to life in the Son. Name one specific way Jesus is forming you, through this passage, into someone who lives in the victory and the life that are found in Him.

Now or Later

Reflect on these passages: John 16:33, take heart, Jesus has overcome the world; Romans 8:37, more than conquerors through Him who loved us; John 20:30–31, these things written that you may believe and have life in His name; Hebrews 11, the triumphs of faith in God’s people; Matthew 11:28–30, Jesus’ yoke that is easy and His burden that is light.