

Living in God's Son

I have served several churches that included members who were NASA scientists or technicians, and military



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officers who were involved in studying war strategies, as well as nuclear missile defense systems. Those men and women evidenced a deep faith in God. I have also known individuals who rejected faith in Jesus Christ, either because they did not believe in God or they saw religion only as human philosophy attempting to make sense of a material world.

The Apostle John writes out of his personal experiences through the years of Jesus' ministry and the astounding reality of Jesus' resurrection. John writes, "Who is it that conquers the world, but the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God" (v. 5). "Conquers the world" has a military ring, but it reaches beyond a war image to a knowledge that exceeds human intellect and emotional preferences. In his gospel John describes Jesus: "the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we beheld his glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth" (John 1:14). In this brief letter written to a congregation challenged by popular false religion and doubt, John tells them they can "know" the truth of Jesus thirty-nine times! This is John's personal statement of faith based on his firsthand experiences with Jesus and years of serving his Savior.

This final chapter of our study can be divided into examining four ways in which Jesus can impact the daily living of those who love God. The first key phrase which begins our study text, "conquers the world" (v. 5), has already been stated in verse 4: "whoever is born of God conquers the world" and "this is the victory that conquers the world, our faith."

"Conquers" can also be translated "overcomes." For a current illustration of the power of the world's influence over our thinking, just pay attention to the daily news, which is flooded with political figures routinely lying, racial rhetoric and violence, and consuming lust for power and money, prejudice against ethnic groups, etc. Our calling as Jesus people is to conquer or overcome this world with the love and grace God has given us in Jesus Christ. Revisit John's earlier chapters to see that, as the people of God, we are to love and transform our society by God's grace.

1 John 4:18 tells us, "there is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear." How do you dare to stand up to all the lies and hatred of our world? You build your thinking, your behavior, and your strength on the love of God that could turn a brutal Roman cross into the unmistakable love of God!

John's second statement on which we must build our living is: "There are three that testify: the Spirit and the water and the blood, and these three agree" (vv. 7-8). This statement sounds odd to us, but it is most likely confronting Corinthian Gnosticism which taught the Spirit of God entered Jesus' physical body at his baptism and exited Jesus' body at the crucifixion (Luke 3:21-22 and 23:44-46) because God cannot be connected to a corrupt physical world. John rejects gnostic thinking with the statement that we see the fullness of God in Jesus with both the water and the blood, adding that God's Spirit is "the testimony of God," not a human testimony (vv. 9-10). Who are we to believe, the gnostics or God?

John answers: "God gave us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. Whoever has the Son has life, and this life is in his Son. Whoever has the Son has life: whoever does not have the Son does not have life" (vv. 11-12). We can never fully comprehend God, but in the life-death-resurrection of Jesus we can see the full evidence of God's love and grace. God has come to us in a way we can begin to understand, a way that stops us dead in our tracks and gives us God's love in spite of all the temptations, confusion, and pain of this world. Jesus is our source of life.

Those early believers were struggling against the relentless deceptions of their world, the tragedies and injustices encountered, and the pressure of popular false religions. They, like us, needed to "know" the truth of God's love in Christ. John writes these truths to those who "may know you have eternal life" (v. 13). Because they (we) believe in the Son of God there is a boldness (assurance, confidence) that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. And if we know that he hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have obtained the requests made of him" (vv. 14-15). John is saying that if you love God as his child, God will respond to your needs and challenges.

One caution: this is not a spoiled child/pushover parent relationship. As God's child, our requests should not be selfish, but shaped by God's gracious purposes. Answered prayer is a miracle in which we

grow to trust God more. John mentions our praying for a brother or sister in the faith who has committed a sin that is not "mortal." Jesus taught: "any sin and blasphemy against the Spirit shall not be forgiven" (Matthew 12:31). Faith in God opens a life to wonderful possibilities. Rejection of God closes the door of hope. John's singular point is that our prayers for others can make the difference.

John goes on to point out Christ is God's ultimate gift of life beyond the circumstances and limits of this world. He uses the word "know" four times in describing key truths:

1. Because of Christ we *know* we must not sin (v. 18)
2. Because of Christ we *know* the potential dangers of this evil world (v. 19)
3. Because of Christ we *know* the truth of Christ compared to the deceptions of this world (v. 20)
4. We *know* that Jesus is "the true God and eternal life" (v. 20)

The New Testament word *mathetes* is commonly translated "disciple," meaning learner or student. In that day there were no colleges or trade schools. Followers of Jesus or "disciples" were learning how to live in a radical new way, trusting God with all of life, and demonstrating a morality and compassion unfamiliar to their world.

John describes Jesus as "the true God and eternal life" (v. 21). Note Jesus is more than the doorkeeper of eternal life, he is that life. There is a connection, an intimacy, in the Christian life that has no comparison to creeds, doctrinal statements, or rituals. God loves you, gives you that love in the coming of Jesus, and lives within you through the abiding presence of his Spirit in your life.

When you feel alone or vulnerable ... when you see yourself as a failure ... when you don't know what to do in life's challenges ... remember that every moment, regardless of your feelings or circumstances, God has given you a new life in his Son. Nothing or no one can take that life away from you.

Paul's powerful words encourage us: "I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 8:38-39). By faith you are alive in God's Son!