

The Victorious Life

1 John 5:1-5

2115

INTRODUCTION

First John 5:1-5 depicts the victorious life. The Bible uses many terms to describe those who have entered into a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. For instance, we are called Christians. We are also called the children of God (John 1:12), children of light (Eph. 5:8), children of the day (1 Thess. 5:5), and children of obedience (1 Pet. 1:14). But there is another title in the New Testament that may be as exciting as any other, and it is the title overcomers. That is the title John uses in 1 John 5:4: "Whatever is born of God overcometh the world; and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith."

LESSON

I. THE DEFINITION OF AN OVERCOMER

A. The Salvation of Overcomers

Verse 4 tells us that Christians are overcomers. Only those who have been born of God are the only true overcomers.

1. An overcomer defined

The Greek word translated "overcomer" literally means "victor." The verb form is nikao, and the noun form is nike. The verb means "to conquer," "to have victory," or "to have superiority". It sometimes means "to defeat."

The Greeks believed that real victory could be achieved only by the gods, and not by men. Only the gods were conquerors and unconquerable. The Greek goddess of victory was named Nike. The United States even used that name for one of its aerial missiles.

2. An overcomer demonstrated

A form of the word nikao is used by our Lord in John 16:33 where He said, "I have overcome the world." It is a word of victory. Jesus, in effect, said, "I have conquered Satan's system." One of the truths about a Christian is that he is in Christ. The Christian is in an indivisible union with Christ Himself and as a result, is a partaker of His divine nature. A Christian partakes of everything that Christ is and has, including His inheritance, righteousness, death, life, and Spirit. Since Christ is a victor, Christians partake of His victory. The believer then, is a victor. Those who have been born of God are true overcomers.

B. The Spoils of an Overcomer

1. Satan

a) Satan's appearance of victory

One of the things Christians have overcome is Satan. We are victors over Satan. It may seem like Satan has victory now, but ultimately he won't.

(1) Revelation 6:2

Revelation 6:2 says, "And I saw and, behold, a white horse; and he [the Antichrist] who sat on it had a bow; and a crown was given unto him, and he went forth conquering, and to conquer." A form of nikao, is used here. He went forth as a victor to gain a victory. Satan will have the initial victory. He will cause some devastating things in the early part of the tribulation, as all of humanity succumbs to him.

(2) Revelation 13:7

Revelation 13:7 says, "It was given unto him to make war with the saints, and to overcome them; and power was given him over all kindreds, and tongues, and nations." Satan will make war with the saints and seem to overcome them. Satan appears to be the victor.

b) Christian's assurance of victory

But that isn't the whole story. Ultimately the book of Revelation says the saints are going to triumph over Satan.

(1) Revelation 12:11

Revelation 12:11 says, "They overcame him by the blood of the lamb, and by the word of their testimony; and they loved not their lives unto the death." The saints ultimately will gain the victory.

(2) Revelation 15:2

Revelation 15:2 says, "I saw, as it were, a sea of glass mingled with fire, and them that had gotten the victory over the beast, and over his image, and over his mark, and over the number of his name, standing on the sea of glass, having the harps of God." That is a picture of the victorious saints, in heaven, having conquered Satan and his false trinity.

(3) Revelation 21:7

Revelation 21:7 says, "He that overcometh shall inherit all things, and I will be his God, and he shall be my son."

(4) Romans 16:20

Romans 16:20 says, "The God of peace shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly." Satan has been defeated at the cross. The ultimate battle has already been won. Positionally, he is already defeated; but practically-- as we learn the Word of God--we need to exercise that victory on a day-to-day basis.

2. Death

Immediately upon receiving salvation, the Christian overcomes death. First Corinthians 15:54-57 says, "When this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ." The believer conquers death.

3. The World

The third thing a Christian conquers is the world. First John 5:4 says, "Whatever is born of God overcometh the world." The believer is a victor over the invisible, spiritual system of evil that operates in the world to capture men's souls for hell. When someone is saved, he is removed out of the clutches of Satan and hell, and reserved for heaven. The believer has conquered the system in

Christ. If you look carefully at the phrase "whatever is born of God" in verse 4, you will find it is in the present tense, which means that the Christian is continually having victory over the world. It is a habit of life for the saint to conquer the world's system.

What does it mean to be a victor? For one thing, it is foolish to lose when we have the power to overcome. Positionally, we have conquered Satan, death, and the world. But from a practical standpoint, we need to claim and exercise that victory on a day-to-day basis. Christians are overcomers. Everyone else in the world is defeated.

II. THE DESCRIPTION OF AN OVERCOMER

First John 5:1-5 gives us a list of three characteristics that are common to all overcomers:

A. Faith in Jesus Christ (vv. 1a, 4)

"Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ is born of God For whatever is born of God overcometh the world; and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith."

Overcomers are people born of God--people who have put their faith in Jesus Christ. When you place your faith in Christ, you are born of God and become a victor.

1. A trust that is total

Many have wondered what John meant when he said, "Christ is born of God" (1 John 5:1). Some have thought John meant that Christ was a something that God spawned or created. But that isn't the idea. The Greek text is saying that Jesus has been begotten out of God, not created by Him. Jesus is the Anointed One who came out of the very essence of God. He is God, having invaded the world and taken on human form.

We are overcomers by the act of believing, which results in our new birth. All that is required to be an overcomer is to believe that Jesus is the Anointed One who has come from God. The Greek phrase combines both the present and perfect tense: "Whoever is believing that Jesus is the Anointed One, has been born of God." That tells us that faith is a result, not the cause of the new birth. If you have been truly born again, you will continue to believe. Some people think all that is required in salvation is a moment of faith. But true Christians have faith from the point of salvation onward. Jesus said in John 8:31, "If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed." Sons of God will manifest that they have been begotten of God by continuing to believe in God's eternal, only begotten Son.

2. A faith that is fundamental

First John 5:1 states that a person who is born of God believes that Jesus is the Christ. He must believe that Jesus the man is God incarnate--the Messiah, King, Savior, Redeemer, and the center and focus of revelation. The Cerinthian gnostics, whom John was dealing with, denied that Jesus was the Christ. John said their claims were worthless unless they believed that Jesus is God in human flesh. The Greek word translated "belief" is not referring merely to intellectual attainment or mental acquiescence, but a wholehearted acceptance of everything that is implied in the claims of Christ. You need to believe that Jesus is God and that He died for our sins, committing your whole life to Him in sacrifice and serving Him as Lord. That characterizes people who are born of God and are overcomers.

First John 5:4 further defines the concept of faith: "Whatever is born of God overcometh the world; and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith." "Believe" and "faith" are two English words for the Greek words pistas, and pisteuo. The essential ingredient in the life of the overcomer is

his faith. The Christian's victory is based on the reality that Jesus Christ is who He claimed to be. First John 5:5 says, "Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God?" John is emphasizing the need to believe in Christ because he has already mentioned that phrase many times in the epistle of First John and three times in this passage as well. He is saying in verse 5 that the basic characteristic of an overcomer is that he believes in Jesus Christ. A believer is one whose faith overcomes the world.

The Struggle for Solutions

There are many people in this world who struggle to find solutions for the plagues and problems of this life that can't be solved. But Jesus says, "I offer you a life that is victorious over Satan and all his forces, including death and the plagues of the system that corrupts this world. All I ask is that you believe I am God in the flesh who died for your sin and rose again for your justification." If you place your faith in Christ, you are born into a new victorious life. I don't want to be victimized by Satan, who goes around as a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour (1 Pet. 5:8). I don't want to be victimized by death and sent to hell. And I don't want to be victimized by the evil world's system, which tries to take the earth from Christ. If there is victory to be had, I want it. Jesus said you can be a super-conqueror if you believe in Him and are born again. Overcomers are characterized by faith.

B. Love for Jesus Christ (vv. 1b, 5)

"And everyone that loveth him that begot loveth him also that is begotten of him.... Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the son of God?"

It is characteristic of overcomers not only to love God, but also to love all who are begotten of God. A true believer confesses Christ and loves his brothers.

1. Objects of love

First John 5:2 says, "By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God, and keep His commandments." The new birth brings us not only into a relationship with the eternal Son, but into a relationship with the children of the Father as well. In First John 5:2, John gives a self-evident, universal principle that he has given in many other places (1 John 2:5, 10-11; 3:10; 4:7-8, 12, 21): If you love God, you will love your brothers. Everyone who loves the parent will also love the child. Salvation is not only being in love with God but being in love with God's children as well. If I am born of God, then I will love all who are born of God, for God also dwells in them.

2. Characteristics of love

Love is not a sentiment; it is a sacrificial act. For example, 1 Peter 4:8 says, "Love covers a multitude of sins" (NASB). If I love someone, I will have a desire to rebuke their sin, cover it, and forgive it. True love doesn't manifest itself by publicizing evil. Love is very practical. That kind of love is characteristic of all who are overcomers because they love their brothers.

John says the reverse in 1 John 5:2: "By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God, and keep his commandments." In verse 1 John says that we know we love God because we love our Christian brothers. In verse 2 he says we love them because we love God. Some will say he is reasoning in a circle, and that's exactly right. You can't love the brothers without loving God, and you can't love God without loving the brothers. One proves the other. John is saying it is characteristic of overcomers to love one another.

C. Obedience to Jesus Christ (vv. 2-3)

"By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God, and keep his commandments. For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments: and his commandments are not burdensome."

1. Internal obedience

Faith, love, and obedience are all woven together. John ties obedience to love in verse 2: "We love God, and keep his commandments." He ties love to obedience in verse 3: "This is the love of God, that we keep his commandments." And he ties faith to love in verse 1: "Everyone that loveth him that begot loveth him also that is begotten of him." All three are inextricable. Love, faith, and obedience to God's Word are all characteristic of the believer. But the genuine proof of love is obedience. God wants obedience that is internally, not externally motivated. God wants us to obey out of love, not fear (1 John 4:18). In Romans 6:17-18 Paul said, "God be thanked, that whereas ye were the servants of sin, ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered to you. Being, then, made free from sin, ye became the servants of righteousness." Paul was saying Roman Christians had obeyed from the heart. God doesn't want superficial, external obedience, but obedience that is motivated from the heart.

2. Total obedience

In addition to internal obedience, God wants total obedience. Partial obedience does not satisfy God at all. Some people think God is satisfied when they do a few things right and a few things wrong. But He is not going to settle for two out of three. He wants total obedience. Some people say they believe all the Bible except the part that says wives are to submit to their husbands, but that's not acceptable. In Joshua 22:2-4, Joshua said to the Israelites, "Ye have kept all that Moses, the servant of the Lord, commanded you, and have obeyed my voice in all that I commanded you. Ye have not left your brethren these many days unto this day, but have kept the charge of the commandment of the Lord your God. And now the Lord your God hath given rest unto your brethren, as he promised them." God kept His promise as their obedience was total and motivated by the heart.

3. Constant obedience

The third kind of obedience that God wants is constant obedience: "Wherefore, my beloved, as ye have always obeyed, not as in my presence only but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling" (Phil. 2:12). God desires constant obedience; we're not to be obedient only when we feel like it.

4. Cheerful obedience

The final kind of obedience that God wants is at the heart of what real obedience is: cheerful obedience. Some of you may be wondering how you could possibly obey as God wants you to. But you can.

a) 2 Corinthians 9:7

Paul wrote "Every man [is to give] according as he purposeth in his heart, so let him give, not grudgingly, or of necessity; for God loveth a cheerful giver." We are commanded to give cheerfully.

b) Philippians 4:4

This verse tells us to "Rejoice in the Lord always; and again I say Rejoice." Disobedience is a sin, but externally motivated, partial, inconsistent, grudging obedience is also wrong. God wants a loving, total, constant, and joyous response of obedience. He can ask for that because His commandments are not grievous or burdensome (1 John 5:3). Jesus' commandments are not grievous for three reasons: one, if you mess up, He forgives you; two, He never asks you to do something without

giving you the power to do it; and three, we keep His commandments not out of fear, but out of love. That doesn't mean they aren't ever difficult, just that they aren't impossible.

III. THE DELIGHTS OF AN OVERCOMER

John describes the fantastic delights of the overcomer. There is one problem: He didn't describe them in 1 John. They are in the book of Revelation. In Revelation 2 and 3 there are seven letters to seven first century churches. At the end of every letter is a promise to the overcomer. Those promises were given to the true believers in those particular churches, but they also apply to every believer throughout the ages.

A. The Tree of Life (Rev. 2:7)

The first delight of an overcomer is the gift of the tree of life. Revelation 2:7 says, "He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches: To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God." There was a tree in the Garden of Eden called the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. When Adam and Eve ate of that tree, they became sinners. But there was another tree in the Garden called the tree of life. God took Adam and Eve out of the Garden because He didn't want them to eat from the tree of life. He didn't want sinners to have eternal life because that would have brought sin into His eternal dwelling place. He put an angel with a flaming sword to guard the Garden so they couldn't get back in and eat from the tree of life.

But did you know that God transplanted that tree out of the Garden and into heaven? Revelation 22:2 says, "In the midst of the street of it, and on either side of the river, was there the tree of life, which bore twelve kinds of fruits, and yielded her fruit every month; and the leaves of the tree were for healing of the nations." Now that's a big tree, if it is on both sides of one river! It has twelve kinds of fruit. Did you ever see a tree like that? Not without a lot of string on it! It yields its fruit every month. Its leaves serve as therapy for the nations. The word "healing" doesn't refer to the healing of disease; it refers to providing health. We won't be hungry or thirsty in heaven, but we will eat and drink for pure enjoyment. Revelation 2:7 says, "To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God." That means the overcomer is promised heaven. The first delight for overcomers is the eternal enjoyment of God's presence in His paradise.

B. Eternal Life (Rev.2:11)

The second thing promised to the overcomer is eternal life. Revelation 2:11 says, "He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches: He that overcometh shall not be hurt of the second death." There are two deaths mentioned in the Bible: the first is physical death and the second is spiritual death. Spiritual death results in eternal death. The overcomer will not be harmed by the second death. Everyone will die physically, for verse 10 says, "Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life," but the believer will never die spiritually. That's exciting! The man who is not an overcomer dies only to die again. The overcomer dies to live forever. What a promise!

C. The Bread of Life (Rev. 2:17)

The third delight of an overcomer is the hidden manna of God and a white stone from God. Revelation 2:17 says, "He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches: To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the hidden manna, and will give him a white stone, and in

that stone a new name written, which no man knoweth except he that receiveth it." The overcomer receives two things:

1. Hidden manna

The first is hidden manna. And that manna is Jesus. It is nothing more or less than feasting on the presence of Jesus Christ. People often ask what heaven will be like. I always say, "Heaven is where Jesus is." That's enough for me-- feasting on His presence, for Jesus is the hidden manna and the Bread of Life. Oh, what a rich banquet, just to spend forever in His presence!

2. A White stone

God will not only give us manna, but a white stone as well. In the Greek text, the white stone refers to a diamond. There is debate about what that might mean. But I have one thought.

In the Old Testament, the priest had on his breastplate a bright stone called the urim. When people wanted to know God's will, He revealed it in that stone. The white stone might refer to the absolute and ultimate knowledge of God's will. What more could we ask for than to have all of God's revelation and knowledge given to us in glory?.

Have you ever thought about what heaven is like? It might seem so impersonal with only righteous people around. Will we feel like a lot of celestial cattle being herded around? No! God is going to give each of us a crystal in which a new name will be written known only by the person who receives it. My stone will say one thing; yours will say something else. Whatever else will go on in heaven, God and I will have our own thing going! The same will be true of you. We will all be individuals in glory. What will your new name be? How could I tell you? No one will know but you and God!

We are going to have a personal relationship with God forever. We're going to be in the presence of the hidden manna--Jesus Christ. We're going to be eating of the tree of life and lapping up the water from the crystal river flowing from His throne. We'll never be touched by the second death. What terrific promises!

D. The power of life (Rev. 2:26-28)

Revelation 2:26-28 says, "He that overcometh, and keepeth my works unto the end, to him will I give power over the nations; And he shall rule them with a rod of iron; as the vessels of a potter shall they be broken to shivers, even as I received of my Father. And I will give him the morning star."

1. Power over the nations

What is meant by the phrase, "power over the nations"? In Psalm 2:8-9 God said He will give power over the nations to the Messiah. Revelation 2:27 says that as Jesus receives power over the nations, He will give it to us. We will rule with Christ in His millennial kingdom.

You might think that His rule will be harsh since He will rule with a big rod. The Greek word for "rule" is poimanei, and is translated "shepherd." It is a shepherd's rod, not a billy club.

There will be discipline in the kingdom. Where evil and sin dwell, judgement will be enforced. But there will also be caring, nourishing, and tenderness in this Shepherd's rod. That is what the phrase "power over the nations" refers to. Could you ever dream of being seated together with Christ on His throne? You may say, "Who me? I'm not even the foreman on my job!" But remember, our ruling in the kingdom is by pure grace.

2. The morning star

Revelation 2:28 says, "I will give him the morning star." We own the morning star. Revelation 22:16

says, "I, Jesus, have sent mine angel to testify unto you these things in the churches. I am the root and the offspring of David, and the bright and morning star." Who is the morning star? Jesus. You know who's going to be mine in heaven? Jesus. He is given to overcomers. In 2 Peter 1:19, Peter says, "And the day star [will] arise in your hearts." In a sense, the morning star is already shining in us, but some day He will belong to us in the fullness of His presence. We will rule the nations and possess the Lord of the nations for our very own.

E. The book of life (Rev. 3:5)

Revelation 3:5 gives us the fifth delight of an overcomer: "He that overcometh, the same shall be clothed in white raiment; and I will not blot his name out of the book of life, but I will confess his name before my Father, and before his angels." Here are two more features for an overcomer.

1. Clothed in white raiment

White raiment refers to righteousness, purity, holiness, and glory. We're going to be clothed in white, and that's Christ's color. When He comes out of heaven riding on a white horse, wearing a white robe, we will be with him on white horses and dressed in white robes. Because of His own righteousness, He clothes us in His own holiness, purity, and righteousness.

2. Confessed before God

John further states, "And I will not blot his name out of the book of life, but I will confess his name before my Father, and before His angels" (Rev. 3:5). Many people are confused by that phrase. They say, "Does that mean that you could get your name blotted out of the book of life?" No! the text says, "I will not blot his name out of the book of life" (emphasis added). We are secure in Christ.

In John's day, kings in every area had a registry. All the people's names were put into that registry. When anyone committed a criminal act, his name was removed from the registry. Our Lord is saying "The world may cross you off its lists, kings may remove your name for the crime of Christianity, but I will never blot your name out of My book." That doesn't mean you can't be sure; it means you can be sure. You are secure in Him. It doesn't imply that God takes names out; it emphasizes that He keeps them in! Aren't you glad that your salvation is guaranteed? He says, "I will confess his name before my Father and before His angels." When I get to heaven, Jesus is going to say, "Father, angels, here is John MacArthur." Wow!

F. The name of life (Rev. 3:12)

Revelation 3:12 says, "Him that overcometh will I make a pillar in the temple of my God, and he shall go no more out; and I will write upon him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem, which cometh down out of heaven from my God; and I will write on him my new name."

1. The "pillar in the temple of my God"

What does it mean to be a pillar in God's temple? In John's day, important people were honored by placing a pillar inscribed with their name in the local temple. Great temples to certain gods became monuments of perpetual honor to famous citizens, because they would begin to mark those pillars with the names of these citizens. As overcomers you and I have pillars in the celestial hall of fame. In fact, we are pillars! We are eternally honored in God's celestial hall of fame.

The verse continues by saying, "And He shall go no more out." Historically, this letter was written to the church at Philadelphia, which was located near a volcano field. They were constantly being

subjected to earthquakes. Whenever an earthquake would occur, the people would flee from the city because it was often destroyed. The Lord was saying to this group of believers, "I'm going to make you pillars, and you're never going to have to flee. You're never going to have to fear. In heaven there is no fear, No pillar has ever collapsed there. You're secure."

2. The "name of my God"

In addition, Jesus is going to write on us "the name of my God," which is the mark of possession. Then He is going to write "the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem, which cometh down out of heaven from my God." That is the mark of citizenship. Then He will write "my new name," which is the mark of love. We belong to God, to heaven, and to Jesus. We are going to have their names written on us. We'll be pillars, never shaken, never fearful, never having to run. That's exciting!

G. The throne of life (Rev. 3:21)

The seventh delight of an overcomer is in Revelation 3:21: "To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne." The supreme thing is to be in heaven seated on the throne of God.

Can you imagine what would have happened if you had been living in the days of the Caesars, and sat on Caesar's throne and said, "This is terrific Caesar!" You would have lost your head! We will be co-reigning with Jesus, sitting in His throne, and He will be sitting in the Father's throne. We are all going to be in the same place.

Do you have a picture of what it means to be an overcomer, and to someday enjoy the delights of being an overcomer forever? I praise God I am an overcomer!

Focusing on the Facts

1. Who are the only true overcomers according to 1 John 5:4?
2. What are the various renderings of the word "overcomer"?
3. What are the three major things Christians have victory over?
4. What three things must characterize all who are considered true overcomers?
5. What is the difference between Jesus coming out of God and being created by God (1 John 5:1)?
6. The essential ingredient in the life of the overcomer is his _____.
7. What self-evident, universal principle did the apostle John give in 1 John 2-4?
8. What is the genuine proof of love?
9. List the four kinds of obedience God desires from us.

10. Out of that list, which of the four is at the heart of what real obedience is?
11. There are three reasons Jesus' commands are not burdensome. What are they?
12. What are the seven delights of an overcomer?
13. Why did God expel man from the Garden of Eden?
14. What is the result of receiving the gift of the tree of life?
15. What are the two deaths described in the Bible and what is the result of both?
16. What is the meaning of the hidden manna and the white stone?
17. What is meant by the phrase "power over the nations"?
18. Who is the "morning star"?
19. Explain two features associated with being in the book of life.
20. What does it mean to be a "pillar in the temple of my God"?
21. What distinctive marks were mentioned in the sixth delight, the "name of life"?
22. What is the supreme delight of an overcomer?

Pondering the Principles

1. Throughout the centuries, athletes have endured grueling training to gain victory and the spoils that come with it only to find that victory is often elusive. Christians however, as victors or overcomers, have complete certainty about the ultimate victory, which is eternal life with Jesus Christ (see 1 John 5:11-13). Look up the following Scriptures and write out how you can practically have victory over Satan (Matt. 4:1-11), death (John 5:24; Rom. 6:3-9), and the world (1 John 5:4; John 17:14).

2. It was said that faith, love, and obedience are inextricably linked and that the genuine proof of love is obedience through faith (see pp. 6-7). Take a pen or pencil and draw a triangle with each of those words at the points, writing obedience at the top. Now look up the following verses that deal with those three areas and try to match them with the right word: Heb. 11:1; 2 Cor. 10:5; John 13:34; 1 Pet. 1:22; 2 Cor. 5:7; Rom. 12:9. Think of other verses dealing with those areas, and write them beside the correct word and begin to memorize them.

3. In Revelation 2 and 3, we read about seven delights of an overcomer (see pp. 7-12). Take one of the seven each day, write it out and pray, thanking God that you are an overcomer. Think of specific

things throughout the day that remind you of those rewards. Continue to thank God that you are an overcomer.

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