

A Conquering Faith

Bible Background • 1 JOHN 4–5

Printed Text • 1 JOHN 4:2–3, 13–17; 5:4–5 | Devotional Reading • JOHN 14:15–24

Aim for Change

By the end of this lesson, we will REMEMBER the love of God described by the writer of 1 John, REFLECT on the various expressions of God’s love in our lives, and RESPOND to the challenge to love others with Christ-like love.

In Focus

When Deidra got to church Sunday morning, Ricky was right in her face. He was clingy and hardly gave her space to talk to anyone else. Deidra tolerated Ricky because he was a member of her Sunday School and a fellow brother in Christ. Though Deidra appeared to be kind, inside she was fuming with anger at Ricky’s inability to take what she was sure were obvious clues that she was not comfortable with his attentiveness.

Deidra began to feel guilty about being nice to Ricky and then mocking him behind his back. Deidra understood her behavior did not reflect the teachings of Christ, which meant loving our fellow brothers and sisters in the family of God. This meant she had to be honest and forthright with Ricky and stop her cruel remarks about him to others.

Deidra tried to think of how God saw Ricky. God knew that Ricky was only trying to be kind, but didn’t understand social situations the way most people did. Maybe instead of shutting him down, Deidra could help Ricky learn how to read the room better.

The following Sunday, Deidra talked to Ricky and related her discomfort. She felt the resentment leave, replaced by a greater appreciation for Ricky, who graciously received her message.

How do we interact with others to show that we “dwell in love” with God? Should these interactions differ between Christians and non-Christians?

Keep in Mind

“We know how much God loves us, and we have put our trust in his love. God is love, and all who live in love live in God, and God lives in them.” (1 John 4:16, NLT)

Words You Should Know

- A. Perfect** (1 John 4:17) *teleioo* (Gk.)—To complete or accomplish, bring to an end
- B. Overcometh** (5:4) *nikao* (Gk.)—To conquer, overcome, or prevail

Say It Correctly

Johannine. joe-HAH-nine

Antichrist. AN-tie-cry-st

KJV

John 4:2 Hereby know ye the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God:

3 And every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God: and this is that spirit of antichrist, whereof ye have heard that it should come; and even now already is it in the world.

13 Hereby know we that we dwell in him, and he in us, because he hath given us of his Spirit.

14 And we have seen and do testify that the Father sent the Son to be the Saviour of the world.

15 Whosoever shall confess that Jesus is the Son of God, God dwelleth in him, and he in God.

16 And we have known and believed the love that God hath to us. God is love; and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him.

17 Herein is our love made perfect, that we may have boldness in the day of judgment: because as he is, so are we in this world.

5:4 For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world: and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith.

5 Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God?

NLT

John 4:2 This is how we know if they have the Spirit of God: If a person claiming to be a prophet acknowledges that Jesus Christ came in a real body, that person has the Spirit of God.

3 But if someone claims to be a prophet and does not acknowledge the truth about Jesus, that person is not from God. Such a person has the spirit of the Antichrist, which you heard is coming into the world and indeed is already here.

13 And God has given us his Spirit as proof that we live in him and he in us.

14 Furthermore, we have seen with our own eyes and now testify that the Father sent his Son to be the Savior of the world.

15 All who declare that Jesus is the Son of God have God living in them, and they live in God.

16 We know how much God loves us, and we have put our trust in his love. God is love, and all who live in love live in God, and God lives in them.

17 And as we live in God, our love grows more perfect. So we will not be afraid on the day of judgment, but we can face him with confidence because we live like Jesus here in this world.

5:4 For every child of God defeats this evil world, and we achieve this victory through our faith.

5 And who can win this battle against the world? Only those who believe that Jesus is the Son of God.

The People, Places, and Times

John. The writer of 1 John is thought to be John the apostle and Gospel-writer. John, like his brother James, was a fisherman until he was called by Jesus to join the other eleven disciples. For three years, he followed and learned from Christ. John, along with Peter and James, was a part of Jesus' inner circle. In his own Gospel account, he refers to himself as the "disciple whom Jesus loved" (John 21:20). After Pentecost, John was said to have led the church in Ephesus and eventually was exiled during the reign of Domitian to the island of Patmos.

Day of Judgment. This judgment refers to the final and ultimate judgment of God. It involves the final appearance of Christ when He judges the actions of all humankind. This phrase finds its roots in the Old Testament concept of the Day of the Lord. The Hebrews believed this would be the day when God would judge the nations and vindicate His people. In the New Testament, it loses its nationalistic tone and refers to God's solemn condemnation of all evil. On that day, Christians will inherit eternal life and unbelievers the ill-fated choice of eternal damnation (hell).

Background

The letters of John are three brief epistles. This does not mean our study of them should be brief, though, for they deal with insightful and significant questions about the fundamental nature of Christian spiritual experience. The Johannine letters also provide fascinating insight into the condition of the church at the end of the first century. Heresy played a critical and deceptive role in the church. The genuine nature of a committed and obedient relationship to God through Christ is strongly and affectionately depicted and commanded.

Throughout his Gospel and epistles, John uses very simple language to relate complex theological ideas. The unity of the Trinity, the inward and outward lives of the Christian, the presence of the Antichrist and the coming of the end times are all couched in simple, repeated terms: love, light, truth, liar. In this week's passage, John describes how love is evidence of our relationship to God (1 John 4:14-21). The present assurance is so obvious that even the fear of Judgment Day is eliminated (vv. 17-18), knowing that we have already overcome the world (5:4).

At-A-Glance

1. Confident Confessions (1 John 4:2-3, 13-14)
2. Confident Judgment (vv. 15-17)
3. Confident Victory (5:4-5)

In Depth

1. Confident Confessions (1 John 4:2-3, 13-14) Both John's audience and we today have experienced trusting someone who betrayed or deceived them. We overcome deception with faith, that is, the right belief in Jesus, who gives the victory. John gave precautionary advice about avoiding false teachers, as many were claiming to be sent by God (vv. 1-3). Only those who were

truly inspired by the Spirit of God would openly confess the crucified, resurrected Christ. John and the other apostles had witnessed and could verify that Jesus Christ was the incarnate Word (v. 14), the Messiah sent from heaven and sacrificing his life through death on the Cross. This doctrine is of the Spirit of God.

All Christians receive the Holy Spirit as living proof of God's presence in our lives. The Holy Spirit gives us power to love and confess Jesus Christ as Lord and assures that we are truly connected to our Heavenly Father and not being deceived.

Describe a time you heard of someone being misled by a false teacher. How did the experience impact those the teacher misled?

2. Confident Judgment (vv. 15–17) Perfect love does not mean we love perfectly; rather, perfect love is the goal we always keep before us in the person of Jesus. Jesus loves flawlessly because He accepts us with all our imperfections and mistakes, and regardless of our gender, sex, race, marital, educational, economic status, physical, mental, or emotional qualities, age, or cultural background. He loves us!

Knowing we are loved by God diminishes our apprehension of Judgment Day, increases our need to see others saved and supplied us freedom to love indiscriminately and do the work God called us to do. The confidence we receive in acknowledging God's love is not arrogance. Arrogance is when we depend and boast in our own abilities. The confidence that the Bible describes is a declaration of our relationship with Jesus and evidence of the abiding Holy Spirit within us.

How do we ensure our confidence does not become arrogance that turns away rather than attracts others to Christ?

3. Confident Victory (5:4–5) In the letter's final chapter, John turns to the interrelationship of love and righteousness. Those who are born of God do not find His commandments to be troublesome (5:3). The faith of the children of God gives them power to discover victory over the world that would obstruct the execution of commands (v. 4). That faith rests in Jesus as the Son of God (v. 5). When we believe Jesus is the Son of God, we become one with Him. This gives us the victory because He has said, "I have overcome the world" (John 16:33). This is a past tense verb, indicating the victory has already occurred.

How do we "battle against" and "overcome" the world while showing the love of God?

Search the Scriptures

1. How do we know God lives in us (1 John 4:13)?
2. What gives proof that we love God (vv. 16–17)?

Discuss the Meaning

1. Why is it important that we love one another?

2. Why do we fear judgment or punishment from God?
3. How is God's love made perfect?

Liberating Lesson

Society teaches us to love conditionally. Some people live in fear of rejection from those who claim to love them. This is not real love. One of the most remarkable attributes of God is His ability to love unconditionally and completely. No matter what we face in life, God's love is everlasting and nothing can separate us from His love! Not only do we have God's promise of love but also the promise of eternal life. With this kind of reassurance, what keeps us from loving others?

Application for Activation

The Lord has high regards for the community of believers and we should too. All we can do is learn to love and obey God's command. Pray and ask God to reveal where you can extend love to someone in the family of God. After God shows you, act! Write in a journal about how the incident impacted your life and share your experience with the class.

Follow the Spirit

What God wants me to do:

Remember Your Thoughts

Special insights I have learned:

More Light on the Text

1 John 4:2-3, 13-17; 5:4-5

2 Hereby know ye the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God: 3 And every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God: and this is that spirit of antichrist, whereof ye have heard that it should come; and even now already is it in the world. John's first epistle is full of simple either/or statements, making right doctrine absolutely clear for his audience. Those who have the Spirit of God will confess (Gk. homologeo, ho-mo-lo- GEH-oh) that Jesus Christ came in the flesh. Those who do not make this confession have the spirit of antichrist. The text of Christ coming in the flesh is likely a reference to false teaching from Gnostics spreading through the church at the time. They believed the physical world was completely corrupt, while the spiritual world was completely pure. God revealing Himself to us in a body of presumably corrupt flesh,

therefore, did not fit with their worldview. In order to maintain their human philosophy, they denied the orthodox doctrine of the Incarnation.

John wrote to the church several times about this kind of heresy, showing how difficult it was to root out. One reason for this is that it is almost correct. Christ Himself speaks about the world's evils (John 17:16). However, eyewitness accounts—and the very mechanism of salvation—insist on Christ having a physical, earthly body. No human philosophy should stand in our way of believing what Christ has revealed about Himself to us. We must make sure we are knowledgeable about God's Word so we can recognize false teaching and doctrines when they arise. Believers are members of the family of God who have embraced God's truth and are immersed in God's Spirit. Therefore, they have the power to triumph over the deceptions and trickery of false teachers.

It is tempting to dive into speculation about the "spirit of antichrist" and the "day of judgment" (v. 17). Since 1 John and Revelation were both written by the same apostle, it is easy to jump to discussions of the End Times in connection with these verses. However, we must simply read what the text says: "the spirit of antichrist [is] even now already ... in the world" (v. 3). The antichrist here, therefore, is not precisely the Beast of John's apocalyptic vision. The word "antichrist" (Gk. *antichristos*, an-TIE-kreese-toce) is most simply translated "against Christ." The "spirit of antichrist" we see in the world is not necessarily the overt workings of the devil in the end times, but any way of life that sets itself against Christ as we understand Him from Scripture.

13 Hereby know we that we dwell in him, and he in us, because he hath given us of his Spirit. 14 And we have seen and do testify that the Father sent the Son to be the Saviour of the world. Two themes dominate John's exhortation in these verses: faith and love. In verse 13, John affirms that the assurance of the presence of God in the life of a Christian (cf. vv. 12, 15) is proved by the residence of the Holy Spirit in him or her. Paul also talks similarly about the Spirit being proof that we belong to God (2 Corinthians 1:22). Speaking of the Spirit this way provides a significant connection between 1 John and John's Gospel. In John's Upper Room Discourse, Jesus spoke of the Spirit (or Advocate) as one who would come to maintain a continuity and intimacy of relationship between the disciples and their Master (John 14:15-31; 15:26-27; 16:5-15). Since love is the first of the fruit produced by the Spirit (Galatians 5:2-23), John's connection of love with the Holy Spirit is obvious, in addition to the other work of the Spirit in the life of a believer.

Although no one has seen God, He has revealed Himself visibly in His Son Jesus Christ. As one of the apostolic eyewitnesses, John bears testimony to this fact (cf. 1:1-3). The Greek word *soter* (SOH-tare), savior or deliverer, defines both the purpose and the result of Christ's mission (cf. Matthew 1:21; John 1:29). John tells us how the Father sent the Son for this purpose and now gives us his Spirit as well. This is one of the rare places in Scripture where the Father, Son, and Spirit are each mentioned as distinct Persons of the Godhead, who are all in relationship with us and with each other.

15 Whosoever shall confess that Jesus is the Son of God, God dwelleth in him, and he in God. John places emphasis on the test of faith in Christ as evidence of God's indwelling. The Greek word *homologeō* (ho-mo-lo-GEH-oh, confess) indicates that confession involves the intellectual acknowledgment of the human-divine nature of Christ and a personal acceptance of Him. If we make this profession of faith, it proves that God dwells (Gk. *meno*, MEH-no; to remain, live, or continue) in us and we in Him. This means that we keep intimate fellowship with Christ and allow His life-giving power to produce in us and through us. If we live in Christ and allow Him to live in us, we will produce much fruit (John 15:5). An intimate, progressive, and continuous relationship with Christ is essential to being useful servants of God. The closer we grow to Christ through study and meditation of Scripture, the more our prayers will line up with God's will. And the more our prayers line up with God's will, the more effective our prayer will be (See 1 John 5:14). Since we have this relationship, we then have the boldness and privilege to ask the Father anything (John 15:7). This relationship also gives us boldness on the day of judgment, as the epistle will soon state (v 17).

16 And we have known and believed the love that God hath to us. God is love; and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him. 17 Herein is our love made perfect, that we may have boldness in the day of judgment: because as he is, so are we in this world. John effectively connects faith with works, because to live in love is to act with divine love toward all people. Belief must find expression in behavior. Here, believing and loving are intimately joined. They are proof of God's Spirit in the believer. This is a difficult task, certainly. We may be disillusioned about the true meaning of love or we might behave lovingly toward one another without necessarily feeling love toward others. We also recognize there are different kinds of love and find it difficult to respond appropriately in relationships. John is stating that the ongoing action of God dwelling in us and us dwelling in God perfects our love. By dwelling in love and consequently in God, and by God dwelling in us, love will be made perfect (Gk. *teleiōō*, teh-lay-OH-oh). This word refers to completion of a goal or maturity. Love will be made complete, mature, and fully accomplished in us.

The phrase "because as he is, so are we in this world" refers to God's abiding in us (v. 17). If we dwell in God and God in us, despite being in this imperfect world, we are like God, who is love. This should give us confidence on the Day of Judgment, which comes from loving as Jesus loved us. It does not mean that we will love perfectly, but that we will have evidence that we are believers, and we will have confidence that our hearts are right before God.

5:4 For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world: and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith. 5 Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God? John's confidence in the believer's victory is contagious. Within two verses he uses the words "overcome" and "victory" four times (vv. 4–5). The Greek verb *nikao* (nee-KAH-oh) means to conquer, to overcome, or to prevail, while its related noun *nike* (NEE-kay) means victory or conquest. Anything that has been born of God conquers the world, but here John focuses on our faith as the victory that has already conquered the world. John uses a present tense verb to begin with because there are always obstacles to face in this world, but in talking of faith, he uses a verb that expresses certainty that our faith is complete in

its victory. The way might not be full of roses, yet the Christian life is one of victory from start to finish, not a life of defeat, discouragement, or dread.

Two aspects of the believers' conquest are implied in these verses. First, Christ's victory becomes the believers' own upon their belief in the person and work of Christ, acceptance of Christ as Lord and Savior by faith and consequent union with Christ (cf. John 1:12, 16:33). Second, the abiding presence of the Holy Spirit enables the believer to live in daily victory over the flesh, the world, and the devil. In everyday experience, the Christian can constantly express thanks to God "which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ" (from 1 Corinthians 15:57; cf. 1 John 4:4; Romans 8:37). The person who is born of God is born to win; he or she does not live like a coward or become dominated and defeated by circumstances. The born-again believer lives confidently by faith and has complete trust in God from victory to victory. God's promises are never realized by the fearful but given to those who are overcomers, conquerors through Jesus Christ (Revelation 2:7, 11, 17, 26; 3:5, 12, 21; 12:11, KJV).

Daily Bible Readings

MONDAY

Testing Our Love for God
(Deuteronomy 13:1-4)

TUESDAY

Love God by Keeping His Commandments
(John 14:15-24)

WEDNESDAY

Discerning the Spirit of Truth and Error
(1 John 4:1, 4-6)

THURSDAY

Knowing God, We Can Love Others
(1 John 4:7-12)

FRIDAY

Faith Is the Victory
(1 John 5:1-3)

SATURDAY

Believers in Jesus Have Life
(1 John 5:6-12)

SUNDAY

Faith That Loves Overcomes Obstacles
(1 John 4:2-3, 13-17; 5:4-5)