

We Shall Overcome

#13

1 John 5:1-5

I. INTRODUCTION

- A. If you have followed closely with the argument of 1 John these last twelve weeks, I am sure that you have realized that the concepts of truth, righteousness and love occur over and over again. John's point is that when truth, righteousness and love show up in the life of a professing Christian, it proves or authenticates that this person is a true Christian with the life of God living in him. If a person does not prove that he has right belief in truth, right obedience in righteousness and right love, he is a liar and is no Christian at all.
- B. In 2:22, the Apostle says that a person, who says that he is a Christian and denies that Jesus Christ is true deity and true humanity and the whole truth of the incarnation, is a liar and is not a genuine Christian.

Last Thursday evening it was my privilege to appear on a panel discussion over WBRA Channel 15. One of the panelists was Mr. Leech, an ordained Episcopalian minister and a nice fellow. However, he was quite liberal in his theology and in my opinion probably has never experienced the new birth. He made the statement that it didn't make much difference what a person believed about God, Christ and the Bible for a loving God would not penalize men for what they believed, whether their unbelief was willful or in ignorance. My thoughts at that time went to the book of 1 John and I said to myself, "How would have the Apostle John felt about Mr. Leech's statement?" Of course, he would have rebuked him on the spot.

- C. In 2:4, the Apostle says that if a person claims to know God but yet walks in the darkness of disobedience, he is a liar.
- D. In 4:20, the Apostle says that a person who professes Christianity, claiming to love God, but in real life is not loving his Christian brethren, is a liar.
- E. John is very blunt and direct. The presence of habitual sin or a denial of the person and work of Christ doctrinally or a selfish hatred despite a professed Christian experience will expose all claims to Christianity as phony.
- F. Now in 1 John 5, the Apostle brings all three of these concepts together – truth (belief), righteousness (obedience) and love.

II. TRUTH AND LOVE 5:1

- A. ***“Everyone who believes (continues to believe) that Jesus is the Christ is born of God, (has been born of God).”*** – The title “Jesus” means “savior” and “Christ” is the Greek for “Messiah.” According to the Old Testament the Messiah would be God as well as man. Thus the Apostle John is saying that one must believe that the Messiah is Savior and God. Notice carefully that a continued belief in Jesus Christ as Divine Savior is the result of evidence of the new birth that comes from God. This verse also strongly hints of the fact that initial believing in Jesus Christ is the consequence, not the cause of the new birth. That is, that God sovereignly brings the new birth, enabling a person to trust in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior.
- B. ***“And everyone who loves the father loves his child as well.”*** – This verse clearly tells the Christian who he is to love. He is to love his brother and his brother is any person who has been a recipient of the new birth from God. Every person who has experienced the new birth belongs to the family of God. Thus if you love the Father you will love the other children of the Father anywhere you meet them. Our brother is he who shares the life of Jesus Christ, who is born of God, and who believes that Jesus is the Christ. This includes more than just an intellectual assent to a Christian creed. There are probably millions of people in other churches who can recite the Apostle’s Creed. But it is more than this that the Apostle John is speaking. Those who know the Christ of the Apostle’s Creed personally are those that have been born of God. All who are born of God are in God’s family and what denomination or church he belongs to is only secondary. We are commanded to love all Christians.

What a rebuke this is of all vain denominational and sectarian spirit. Often Christians feel they are obligated to love only those who belong to their particular group. If we are Presbyterians, we love Presbyterians, but we do not like the Episcopalians or Methodists. All too frequently we run into this attitude. If I am Baptist, then I love all those who believe in immersion and this is quite an extensive group. Sometimes it is even more limited than that and we may say, “I love only those who belong to my particular brand of Baptist churches. Or we may love only those who belong to the Independent Fundamental Churches of America, and anyone who belongs to the National Council of Churches is automatically excluded. I am opposed to the N.C.C. but I believe there are some true Christians in this group who are there not fully aware of the liberal tendencies of this group.

Are Christians only to love other Christians and no one else? No, but that is where love must begin. Love must begin within the Christian family and then flow out to the world in general. Love is never limited merely to other brothers or sisters in Christ but love must begin here or we will never learn to love the world of humanity.

III. LOVE AND RIGHTEOUSNESS (OBEDIENCE) 5:2-3

A. ***“This is how we know that we love the children of God: by loving God and carrying out his commands.”*** – Loving God and loving our Christian brethren is all tied up with the concept of obedience. Love is not so much an emotional experience but moral obedience. Real love is sacrificial concern for someone else, and this involves the obedience of the will. This verse by application may help us to answer the sticky question, “How can I know that I truly love my brother?” All of us are aware that there are differences of opinion among true Christians. These differences may be doctrinal out of a genuine search for truth or they may be practical in the area of moral righteousness. When these real differences occur, does this mean that one doesn’t love his brother in Christ? Love to God and keeping His commandments are the Christian’s first responsibility. When one’s action towards his brother arises, not out of personal feeling toward him but out of love for God and a desire to obey His Word, there may be a genuine difference of opinion. In love, two Christians may agree to disagree. Sometimes love must do the unpleasant thing. Sometimes out of a search for truth or in a desire to maintain a biblical standard of morality, we may have to disagree with a person which is not a pleasant thing to do. However, if it is prompted by love to God and obedience to His commandments, it is love even though it makes someone angry, or upsets them temporarily. Love sometimes must be hard to really be kind! Real love often helps a wayward brother in Christ face up to the truth about himself. To overlook an obvious fault in a Christian and to let it go year after year is not real love but selfishness. It is selfishness because we do not want to tell him the truth for we fear what his reaction might be to us. Only truth delivers, only the truth sets free. If you can gently and graciously help another to see a fault, without yourself becoming self-righteous, priggish and condescending, then you know that you love that person with God’s love. You are acting out of love for God and a concern for His commandments.

*Some of my own dearest friends today are those who dared to tell me the truth about myself. Also some of my closest friends are those who I had to rebuke. It was a painful task; it was not easy to do but after the initial blows, there was a warm and wonderful friendship that has deepened ever since. **“Rebuke a wise man and he shall be wiser”**.*

There was one incident that occurred with my own brother. He came to visit us once for a week or so and my children were somewhat unruly – they climbed on the furniture, ran in the house and other things that showed a lack of discipline on my part. My brother came to me in real love and said, “Jack, I love you in the Lord and as a blood brother, so I am going to tell you something you may not like. Your kids lack discipline; they have plenty of love but you must teach them to have better house manners. You, Jack are an elder and if you can’t control your house, you must give up this position in the church.” At first I fought back and put up a stiff argument. Then I just broke down and said, “Bud, I love you and you’re right. Pray for me that I will learn to discipline my children better.” From that time out, my brother and I had a much closer relationship. Why? Well, the truth sets a person free.

Best friends are those who have rebuked you or you have had to rebuke.

- B. ***“This is love for God: to obey his commands. And his commands are not burdensome,”*** – Being occupied with the God of love and the love of God, make the commands of God a blessing to keep and not a burden. If you find it a drag to keep the commands of God, you simply do not understand God or what He has done for you in Christ. The commandments of God appear to be an intolerable burden to the lost world but to the Christian, born of God; it is a great joy to be obedient to the God of heaven and earth. For those of us that must do the unpleasant task of rebuking another Christian, there is blessing. While it may seem to be a thankless job, God will bring blessing. Who of us has not recoiled at having to talk to someone about an unpleasant subject? Who has not wished that someone else would do it, take on the responsibility? Yet, if we do it, if we really love another to the point of helping him face unpleasant truth, we will discover that the results are not burdensome but delightful.

IV. THE RESULTS OF TRUTH, OBEDIENCE AND LOVE 5:4-5

- A. ***“For everyone born of God over comes (is consistently overcoming) the world.”*** – The true child of God will find himself in a real struggle with the world system, which opposes Christ and His ways. But because he is born again, he will see progressive victory over the world. The victory is a proof that we have been born of God.
This does not mean that a Christian cannot fall into the world system but he cannot stay there permanently because he has the life of God in him.
- B. ***“This is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith.”*** – Now the Apostle points us back to man’s responsibility to believe in Christ. When he originally trusted in Christ, there was the potential to overcome the world in Christ. The initial seeds were laid for his progressive victory over the world system. The emphasis is on faith—salvation is not by works but through faith in Jesus Christ.
- C. ***“Who is it that overcomes (is overcoming) the world? Only he who believes (keeps on believing) that Jesus is the Son of God.”*** – The potential for victory was gained for the Christian when he first believed in Christ but he actually will experience this victory when he keeps on believing in Christ in everyday life. You may say, “I cannot go on believing, for my way is too difficult.” John says if you have been born of God, you must and you will overcome the world system and its pressures. This is a guarantee from God that your faith will not fail. The world places such pressures on the Christian in this age. The godless society of this world wants Christians to conform to its attitudes and standards. Take business for instance. What pressure there is to lie or cheat to get ahead, to take advantage of people to make a buck, to maneuver, manipulate and ride roughshod over other people’s rights to be a success. This is the world’s philosophy but the Christian

businessman has the promise that he shall progressively overcome the world. Take the area of morality. There is such pressure to sexual looseness for young people and the unmarried. Pressure to satisfy urges, to give in, and to give up though it may be wrong and deadly. Take the area of human relations. There is pressure to harbor wrong ideas, to reach against others, to strike back, and to be ambitious a cruel for this is the philosophy of the world. But the child of God has the promise that he shall overcome because he is born of God and keeps on believing in Christ. What a comfort and what a challenge to lay hold of Christ more in one's experience. We shall overcome!

V. CONCLUSION

- A. John has told us that the first prerequisite for being a Christian is to know and believe the truth about Jesus Christ. Do you believe the truth about Jesus Christ? Do you believe that He is Savior and God? As the Divine-Savior, do you believe that he died for your sins? Have you personally received Jesus Christ into your life?
- B. The Apostle John said, ***“Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God.”***