

Testimony

1 John 5:1-12

October 10, 2010

Over the last several weeks we have seen John call the church to love God and each other, and to reject false teaching. John has been describing the love we should have for each other in terms of God's love for us. We are to be ready and willing to lay our lives down for each other.

At the same time, John has defined the false teaching as rejecting that Jesus came in the flesh or that Jesus is the Son of God. In short, anything that does not recognize the truth about Jesus, that does not recognize Jesus as revealed in the scripture is false teaching. It is not just love for our brothers and sisters that is important. We must also believe the truths God has revealed in His word.

And so we read, *"Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God, and everyone who loves the father loves his child as well. This is how we know that we love the children of God: by loving God and carrying out his commands."* (vv.1,2) John tells us two things mark a Christian: We are to have the right beliefs and we are to love one another.

The church often has problems holding these two marks at the same time. We either emphasize the need to believe the right things, and forget to love one another, or we emphasize love for one another and set aside the need to hold to the truth.

The first problem is emphasizing belief over love. Even as we seek to correct each other's misunderstandings, we must do so with patience and in

love. Otherwise, we will have a church where everybody believes the right things, but there is no warmth of fellowship and new people are not welcome because they don't believe right yet. The teaching is good, but the Holy Spirit is absent. Even if the gospel is preached the people learn it is not for them. The "gospel" preached here loses its power to draw people to Jesus and nobody is saved.

At the same time, we cannot slip into the other direction and emphasize love for one another to the exclusion of recognizing the need to hold fast and teach the truth once for all delivered to the saints. Even as we seek to love one another and celebrate the awesome forgiveness and freedom that are available in Jesus, we must make sure the people in the church know and understand how God wants them to live and to what purpose He has saved them. If we emphasize love to the exclusion of holding truth, then everyone will know the gospel is for them, but nobody will really know what it is. The "gospel" preached here loses its power to transform people and nobody is saved.

We must hold these two together: love for God and each other, and right living. Indeed, they are inseparable. In case we haven't gotten the point yet, John defines one in terms of the other. *"This is love for God: to obey his commands."* (v.3) Jesus make the same point time and again. Love for God entails obedience to Him. Love for God means that we want to know what He wants of us and we want to do it. It means we both learn the truth in order to live it, and we love one another in the process.

Now, the message of the church is called “good news” for a reason. Loving God and each other by obeying Gods commands is not as hard as it may seem, or as people in the past have found it to be. As John put it, “*His commands are not burdensome.*” (v.3)

Under the law obedience was nearly impossible because the law could only point out where people were sinning. It had no power to free them from the sin.

In Christ, however, we are not under the law, but under His grace. If we are in Christ, or born of God as John puts it, we will overcome the power of sin in the world. It is not a hope. It is not a pipe dream. It is not something we can only find by ignoring the world around us. It is a promise that we will have victory over the power of sin in us because Someone greater than sin is in us. As we saw in the last chapter, “*the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world.*” (1 John 4:4) It is a sure thing, a done deal.

Again, we have to be careful that we understand what John is saying here. Too many people, when they look at these verses, look for worldly victory. The victory John is talking about is not measured in financial wealth or worldly power and influence. It is not victory over the people who hurt us or caused offence. It is not about expensive cars, expensive pens, or your best life now. Victory over the world is freedom from the power of sin in this life and freedom from death in the next. It is being released from slavery to death, and being brought into slavery to life.

So, where is this victory to be found? How do we acquire it? It is found in faith. “*This is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith.*” (v.4) Only

faith can give us the victorious life to which we are called. Only grounding our lives in Jesus Christ, and living according to His word will provide the peace and joy that is so often lacking and power over the sin that so easily wrecks our lives.

In case we haven’t gotten the point yet that faith in God involves believing the right things about Him, John goes on to say, “*Who is it that overcomes the world? Only he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God.*” (v.5) Again, it really does matter what we believe, and if we do not hold fast to the truth of who Jesus is and what God has revealed in His word, we are not promised that we will overcome the world. It’s not just some vacuous faith that God exists and that He loves you that saves. It is accepting God for who He is, accepting the truth about your own sinful condition, and realizing that salvation is impossible outside of Jesus Christ. Jesus is the Son of God, who became the Son of Man so that we might all be joint heirs with Him.

As he brings this point out, John says something about Jesus that sounds a little odd to our ears. He wrote, “*This is the one who came by water and blood—Jesus Christ. He did not come by water only, but by water and blood.*” (v.6) We are coming to the time each year when we joyfully celebrate the fact that Jesus came by the virgin Mary. What is this about coming by water and blood?

Again, we have to remember that John is writing to make sure we believe the truth as opposed to all the wrong things that are taught about Jesus Christ. We have already seen that John was battling the early stages of what would become the heresy we know as

Gnosticism. The people he was refuting either denied Jesus' humanity or His divinity. This is why it is so important to John that we hold to both of them. Those who believed Jesus came as a man, but not as God, believe Jesus became the Christ at His baptism. Not only that, but the ancient form of this belief included the idea that the Christ left Jesus before He went to the cross. Thus, Jesus was born human, He died human, but He was only divine between those two events. This is a lie and John is calling it such here.

It was Jesus Christ who was baptized. It was Jesus Christ who went down into the water. When the Father announced Jesus was His Son, He wasn't starting a new relationship, He was just declaring the relationship that had always been.

Likewise, it was Jesus Christ that died on the cross. It was divine blood that flowed down the wood. It was not a mere man, but the Son of God that hung on the tree. Jesus, the Christ, did not come by water only, but by water and blood. He was God and man in all that He did from His birth to His death on the cross, and He is still both God and man in heaven.

John then turned to the authority he had for these statements. He taught this on the authority of the testimony of the Spirit. The Spirit is truth, and so the teachings He brings to mind about Jesus Christ are true and trustworthy.

John says there are three things that bear witness to the truth of Jesus' person as the Christ: the Spirit, the water, and the blood. Jesus' baptism and crucifixion frame His ministry during which he performed many miraculous signs and wonders. Throughout the Holy

Spirit was present with Him giving testimony to the truth that He is from God and is the Christ who was sent to bring salvation. The Spirit, the water, and the blood all agree. They all testify to the faithful and sinless ministry Jesus had, His acceptance by the Father, and the salvation He came to bring.

With this testimony available to us, John was amazed that anybody could not accept it. We listen to the testimony of people. In a Jewish court, the testimony of two or three witnesses was required for a conviction. John has given us three witnesses that all agree that Jesus is the Christ and has provided the salvation promised by God. If we accept the testimony of mere mortals in a courtroom, how much more should we accept the testimony of the Holy Spirit and the things by which He has confirmed Jesus' identity and mission? As John wrote, "*God's testimony is greater because it is the testimony of God, which he has given about his Son.*" (v.9) Who is going to accuse God of lying? He is the God of truth and His word is sure.

So, how are we to get this testimony of the Spirit? John tells us, "*Anyone who believes in the Son of God has this testimony in his heart. Anyone who does not believe God has made him out to be a liar, because he has not believed the testimony God has given about his Son.*" (v.10) Whether or not we can accept the truth and acknowledge Jesus for who He is depends on whether or not we have faith. If we have the Spirit in our hearts, then we hear His internal witness to our spirits that we are children of God and God's promises are faithful and true. We know we can trust Him and His word because the Holy Spirit reminds and convinces us of it.

If we do not believe in the Son of God, then we do not have the testimony of the Spirit in our hearts, and we will say that the truth God has revealed is a lie. We see this in our culture. Our culture seeks to convince us that the Bible is an old book written for another time. The view of the people around us is that it may have been good for the people who wrote and read it at first, but we have moved beyond it now and know better.

Nothing is further from the truth, of course. The Bible contains everything that we need to know God and the salvation He provides. It instructs us in how to live, what to believe, and how to love each other. As we saw at the beginning of this message, those all go together and cannot be separated without falling into problems.

If we are in Christ, we will accept the Bible as our guide for life and rule for faith. If we are not in Christ we will reject it as a collection of lies and fables. What determines which way we go is the presence and testimony of the Holy Spirit in us.

So, of what, exactly, does the Holy Spirit testify? *“And this is the testimony: God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son.”* (v.11) What a wonderful testimony to have in our hearts! If we are in Christ we will know it because we will have the Holy Spirit giving His testimony to our spirits reminding us of it. He will bring to our minds the things Jesus taught. He will chastize us when we do wrong, placing guilt in our hearts to drive us to the Father for forgiveness. Most of all, He will tell us, regularly and often, that we belong to God and He has given us eternal life in His Son.

If you are in the Son, if you have this testimony of the Holy Spirit to your spirit, then you have life. It is that simple and that profound.

Anyone who does not have the Son of God is still in the grip of the power of death. Eternal life is not provided to all. Those who do not have the Son have no share in the life that He gives. This is not the opinion of mean-spirited fundamentalists who are trying to keep people out of heaven. It is a statement by an all powerful, holy, righteous God, who nonetheless come to His people with forgiveness and mercy. There is a penalty for sin and that penalty is death.

The only way from death to life is faith in Jesus. It is Jesus that paid the penalty for the sin. It is Jesus that suffered death on the cross so that we would not have to. It is in the name of Jesus, and in His name alone, that salvation is found in the forgiveness of our sins. It is at His name alone that every knee will bow and every tongue confess that He is Lord.

If we love Him, we will obey Him, for love of God involves obedience to Him. If we want Him as Savior, but not as Lord, we deceive ourselves and are lost in our sins. If we want Him as Lord, but not as Savior, then we are trying to earn our way instead of accepting His forgiveness. We must both accept His forgiveness realizing nothing we can do can add to our salvation, and we must live obedient lives to His word and the Spirit He places within us. Then we will have the testimony of God Himself that we are His and we have eternal life.