

1 JOHN – CHAPTER 5:4-5

Overcome and Victory

INTRODUCTION

As we transition into the heart of 1 John 5, remember that this chapter is the conclusion of the core message of the letter. In this chapter, we have a wide variety of topics, including overcoming, assurance, belief, testimony, and eternal life. The author, an apostle who witnessed Jesus firsthand, continues his fatherly rhetoric and uses layered repetition to engage the minds of the children (teknion) to align with Apostolic truth. The pinnacle of this chapter focuses on the identity of Jesus as the Son of God, the promise of eternal life.

Last lesson, we worked our way through verses 1-3, making some interesting observations.

- The author uses articular participles to highlight identities instead of actions.
- This identity is rooted in a completed action by God: being “begotten from God.”
- The author also creates a circular continuum between loving God, loving the brethren, and keeping His commandments.
- These concepts are correlated, not causative.
- The commandments, which are to believe in Jesus and love the brethren, are described as “not burdensome” because Jesus has already done the work.

1 JOHN 5:4-5 – OVERCOME AND VICTORY

The word for overcome and victory is then used four times in verses 4-5 (one noun, one verb, two articular participles). In English, we may guess that *victory* and *overcome* are the same, but in Greek, it is clear. The verb is “**νικάω** *nikaō*,” which is defined as prevail, conquer, overcome, win. The main idea is simply winning and was used in ancient Greek for athletics, military, and political struggles (prevail). The nouns are “**νίκη** *nikē*” and “**νίκος** *nikos*,” which are usually translated as victory or conquest.

Victory is the noun, where *overcome* is the verb (also used as a participle). This word means to win. Specifically, the one having been born of God is victorious over the world.

Everyone who has been begotten (articular participle) from God overcomes the world this is the victory (noun) that which has overcome (articular participle – noun of apposition) the world, the faith of ours. Who is the one overcoming (articular participle) the world if not the one believing that Jesus is the Son of God?

The passage begins with a well-known word and phrase: “**πᾶς ὁ γεννᾷ ἐκ ὁ θεός** *pas ho gennao ek ho theos*.” Being born of God is the first and foremost quintessential necessity of being spiritually alive or having eternal life.

1. John 1:12-13 – Being born of God means that one has believed in His name and has now become a child of God. This is in the prologue of John and is developed in John 3.

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2. John 3:1-8 - Being born of the Spirit means becoming spirit in quality and identity, not merely possessing a spirit, which transforms a person's spiritual status before God.
3. 1 John 5:1 – The point is reiterated that the believer in Jesus is born of God.
4. 1 John 5:4 – Now the author is making the point that the one who is born of God overcomes the world.

Overcome in verse 4 is the verb “**νικάω** *nikaō*” and is in the Aorist Active Indicative. This points to a truth that happens at a point in time. This is not a perpetual activity but an accomplished victory. This overcoming is not based on fidelity or works but is based on our position in Jesus Christ.

Why? John 16:33 – Jesus comforts His disciples with this truth. He has overcome (Perfect Active Indicative) the world. Paul also writes about this victory (Romans 8:35-39). In this section, Paul claims victory because we are in Christ and nothing and no one can separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus.

The second half of this verse needs some attention (picture). Normally, when this is taught or applied, it is an activity of faith that overcomes the world.

~ “Our *faith* in the *Son of God* overcomes the world”

~ Catholics and Orthodox emphasize sacramental life; believers apply this by regular participation in church and penance to sustain victory over sin.

~ Reformed Theology applies this by doctrinal confession and reliance on God's sovereignty, leading to confident obedience.

~ Arminian Theology applies this via personal holiness, evangelism, and social reform; faith must be active to sustain victory.

Victory, *overcome* (Articular Participle), and *faith* all have the same declension (Nominative Singular Masculine); all are in apposition to one another. This means they define or clarify each other.

What is not seen in the translations is an article: “THE faith of ours” is also in apposition to “victory” and also in apposition to the Articular Participle being in the Nominative Singular Feminine. The faith of ours is the reason for being designated as being victorious, as being one who overcomes the world.

Notice that it is “the faith of ours.” The definite article cannot be ignored. “The faith” always points to a specific body of doctrine. In this context, it is about Jesus Christ, who He is, what he has done, and the promise He provides. When we believe that doctrine, it becomes “the faith of ours.” The emphasis is on the content, the doctrine, not the believing it. Furthermore, definitions like trust, confidence, or active faith cause confusion.

In what way is the world overcome? This is the first instance where it is understood contextually that the antichrists are of the world. Their doctrines are of error, and their false message is overcome by the true and reliable doctrines of Jesus Christ as proclaimed by the apostles.

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This can also be understood more generally, but it must remain in the context of the verses that use this idea of overcoming the world. This is about the safety and security of the believer in Jesus Christ, not having a victory over all the evil in the world (function). What this does not mean:

1. Our confidence in God does not overcome evil governments or authorities.
2. Believing does not win over our enemies as they criticize, mock, and resist the truth.
3. Trusting God does not have victory over atrocities leading to justice in this world.
4. Believing does not overcome Satan, as he rules this world.

The faith, the person, and the message of Jesus Christ have overcome the world; we are recipients of this victory. Verse 5 substantiates this observation. “Who is the overcoming one?” The core doctrine that is being attacked is the key, and the core doctrine is going to be answered here again.

The answer is a phrase we should know very well, “the believing one that Jesus is the Son of God.” The believer has overcome; once again, this is because Jesus is the overcomer, and we are in Him.

The conclusion then is that being an overcomer is not a designation of behavior but of spiritual position. Paul uses the noun in 1 Corinthians 15:51-58.

The reason that many are convinced that *overcome* is a practical designation is because of the use of the word in Revelation 2-3 in the letters to the churches. The verb is used eight times in these letters (Revelation 2:7, 11, 17, 26, 3:5, 12, 21²). In all these uses, it is common to refer back to the warnings or the admonishment, but the “reward” is not consistent as what would be considered a reward, but a guarantee. The grammatical analysis demonstrates that all these usages (save one) are all articular participles. In 3:21, the eighth usage is Christ stating, “as I also overcame (Aorist Active Indicative).” Let’s read them and see what this means.

We have confidence, we have rest, we have the understanding of the beginning to end, seeing the whole picture as God has laid it out for us. Believing in Jesus is not heavy; it is easy. It is easy because Jesus has done all the work; He fulfilled the law. Not only are we not under law but under grace, but we already have victory. Why act like we have lost? Why act in shame?

Loving the brethren is not burdensome; it’s easy, as long as the love of God is complete in us.

We are not overcoming the world, we are not subduing the world, or bringing it under our dominion. There are successful and unsuccessful believers in this life; that theology is clear in other passages, but that is not the question here. This is definitive, this is assurance, this is confidence in Christ.