



Week 6: 1 John 4:7-14

Victory in Jesus

1 John 4:15-21 – It's All About Love

The Beatles famously sang, “All You Need is Love.” One of my favorite coffee mugs adds what I consider an important corollary: “*And You Need is Love... and Coffee!*” I can’t prove that John and Paul (the Beatles) consulted John and Paul (the Apostles), but it’s clear that both Apostles saw love as the central tenet of Christianity. In **1 John 4:15-21**, love is mentioned 13 times. Some references are about God’s love for us, while others are about our love for God and then our love for others.

If this focus on love is starting to sound repetitious at this point in John’s letter, that’s likely by design. Like a painter who applies a second or third coat of paint to the wall of a house, John is adding layers of love to his letter to emphasize the importance of practicing *agape*.



There are several themes in these verses that are repeated throughout the entire letter of 1 John:

- The theme of **Believing in Jesus** (from 4:15) appears also in 2:23; 3:23; 4:2,3; 5:1,5,10, 13.
- The theme of **Living in God** (from 4:15-16) appears also in 2:6, 10, 14; 3:6, 24(x2); 4:12, 13.
- The theme of **God’s Love for Us** (from 4:16, 19) appears also in 3:1, 16; 4:9, 10, 11, 12.
- The theme of **Loving Others** (from 4:20-21) appears also in 2:10; 3:10, 11, 14, 18; 4:7, 8, 11, 12; 5:1, 2.

It’s important to remember that John’s letter would have been read aloud to the church he was writing to. Papyrus scrolls (the paper they used at the time) were very expensive, and not everyone had the educational background to know how to read and write.

God’s people experienced God’s word in its spoken form, so audible repetition would have been equivalent to putting an important thought in ***bold, italics, and underlined.***

John does not want this church to walk away from this letter without hearing about God’s love, the importance of believing in Jesus, living in God, and loving others.

Spiritual Transformation


When I was a kid, it was pretty common for believers to wear WWJD bracelets, which stood for *What Would Jesus Do?* The idea was to wear a constant reminder that in this life, we are called to follow the example of Jesus. **1 John 4:17** teaches us that in this world, *we are like Christ*. That is written as a statement of fact, rather than a command that we are to follow. Because of our faith in Jesus and faithfulness to his commands, *we are already living like him*.

Spiritual formation is the process of letting God slowly change our hearts, minds, and actions so that we are a better reflection of Jesus Christ. A potter starts with a clump of clay, but molds it into its final design. An artist starts with a palette of brilliant colors, and slowly transforms a blank canvas into a beautiful masterpiece. So it is with God the Father.

Following Jesus means inviting God to take our life and transform it into a better picture of Jesus.

In **Ephesians 4:22-24**, Paul gives us a picture of what spiritual formation is all about:

*“22 You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; 23 **to be made new** in the attitude of your minds; 24 and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness” (NIV).*



**“Like clay in the hand
of the potter, so are
you in my hand,
Israel.”**

Jeremiah 18:6 (NIV)

Disciples of Jesus are created to be like God. A careful reading of **Ephesians 4:23** shows that the process of being made new is in the passive voice—it’s a process that is done *to us*, rather than something that we accomplish *on our own*. **Romans 12:2** also puts it in the passive voice: *“Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but **be transformed** by the renewing of your mind”* (NIV).

God is the one who makes us new and transforms our minds. Certainly we have the power to disrupt his plans and resist his efforts to help us become more like Jesus, but God is the potter and we are the clay. A lump of clay can’t mold itself.

In **Romans 8:29**, Paul writes these words on the subject of spiritual formation: *“For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters”* (NIV).

All of these passages show us that one goal of following Jesus is to allow ourselves to be transformed into a better reflection of the Messiah. D. Moody Smith calls this process *“a participation in the new reality, the new being that God is creating through his Son”* (*Interpretation*, p. 118).

Although this will always be a work in progress from our perspective, from God’s perspective it is an already-accomplished-reality. When God sees his church, he doesn’t see the sin and faults and flaws that so often dominate our view of ourselves. Instead, as Paul writes in **Ephesians 5:25-27**, God sees an unblemished bride:

“25 Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her 26 to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, 27 and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless” (NIV).

Because God chooses to view us through the blood of Christ, we no longer have to fear the consequences of our sin. Because of God’s perfect love, believers in Jesus can be confident instead of afraid on the day of judgment.

1 John 5:1-5—Three-in-One Christianity

The title for this class is *Heart, Head and Hands*, which corresponds to the three ways John wants us to think about Christianity: Attitudes (heart), Doctrines (head), and Actions (hands). These five verses in **1 John 5:1-5** are a very succinct way of tying all of those ideas together. This passage speaks about believing the right doctrines about Jesus (v. 1), loving God (v. 1,) loving others (v. 1), and keeping the commands of God (v. 3). Heart, head, and hands.

Robert Yarbrough sees this three-in-one Christianity as a central theme in the book of 1 John. He describes the three parts and discusses how each one is an integral part of what it means to follow Jesus:

“The pistis (faith), the ethical (obedience to commandments), and the relational or agapic (love for God and others). While none of these three qualities exists in pure form without the other two, the first is primarily doctrinal, the second behavioral, and the third relational.”

Robert Yarbrough. 1-3 John, p. 272, 253.

Are you more of a menu person or a potluck person? When you order from a menu, you get one main dish with perhaps a couple of sides. At a potluck (or buffet), you’re free to sample a little bit of everything. John doesn’t want us to approach Christianity as if we were allowed to order one thing off the menu and fill up on it.

- We can’t simply be about **doctrine** alone. Someone can know the right things about God without showing love or obeying his commands.
- We can’t simply be about **love** alone. Someone can be the kindest person in the world without believing in Jesus as their Lord and Savior.
- We can’t simply be about the **Bible** alone. You can do the right things for the wrong reasons, or perhaps in the wrong way.

Christianity is much more of a buffet. You have to put it all on your plate, because our heart, head, and hands are designed to work in tandem.

“While decent treatment of others, particularly fellow believers (cf. John 13:34–35; Gal. 6:10), is always in order, it cannot be separated from the christologically grounded love for God and the resultant pursuit of God’s commandments that 1 John 5:2 commends.”

Robert Yarbrough, 1-3 John (pp. 272-273).

The truest expression of Christianity is rooted in love of God, relationships with others, and a humble obedience to the Word of God. All of this is expressed in practical, tangible ways, as D. Moody Smith writes:

“The reality of love is not an intellectual abstraction; it is an existential attitude leading to concrete action.”

D. Moody Smith, *First, Second, and Third John: Interpretation*, p. 114.



“Anyone who loves me will obey my teaching. My Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them.”

John 14:23 (NIV)

Victory in Jesus

The Christian singer Mandisa had a huge hit called *Overcomer*. One of my favorite lines from that song goes like this: *“Whatever it is you may be going through / I know he's not gonna let it get the best of you / You're an overcomer.”* John uses the word “overcome” three times in **1 John 5:4-5** to describe the victory that disciples of Jesus will experience.

The word “overcome” comes from the Greek word for victory: *nike*. Yes—Nike like the show company. Nike was also the Greek goddess of victory. It means *“To win in the face of obstacles, be victor, conquer, overcome, prevail”* (BDAG), or perhaps *“Genuine superiority” and “overwhelming success” as demonstrated by an action, where the success is “palpable” and clear for all to see.* (TDNT, IV:942).



“The world” symbolizes the values and temptations we face that draw us away from the life God calls us to live. The world itself was created by God and is loved by God, but “the world” for John means the worst parts of it, the parts that have turned against its creator. With this idea of “the world” in mind, D. Moody Smith describes our victory in this way:

“Those who have conquered the world have risen above it so that it no longer taints or influences, much less determines, them.”

D. Moody Smith, Interpretation, 119

We are promised that through faith in Jesus, we will find victory over the difficulties and temptations and the pull of the world. The victory is not something that we are able to bring about on the basis of our own strength; rather we find victory because we follow Jesus, who has already won the victory for us.

When Jesus was preparing to go to the cross, he wanted to encourage and reassure his disciples that they would not be powerless after his departure. In John 16:33 he told them *“I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world”* (NIV).

Jesus is the ultimate victor, and we can overcome the world because he has already won the victory.

The Victor's Rewards

John more than any other New Testament writer loves to speak about our victory in Jesus. In the book of Revelation, God speaks about the rewards for those who are victorious until the end:

- Eat the hidden Manna (Rev. 2:17)
- Given life as a victor's crown (Rev. 2:10)
- Not hurt by second death (Rev. 2:11)
- Given authority over nations (Rev. 2:26)
- Acknowledge their name before God (Rev. 3:5)
- Made into a pillar in the Temple (Rev. 3:12)
- God's name written on them (Rev. 3:12)
- Sit with Jesus on the Throne (Rev. 3:21)

There are incredible gifts and blessings for those who are victorious, and we are promised this victory because of our faithfulness to Jesus Christ.

But what exactly does it mean to be victorious, to overcome the world? John answers that question in **Revelation 12**, when he tells the origin story of the Devil. The Devil started as an angel of God, but rallied his own angels and tried to wage war against God. Unable to defeat God and his army of good angels, the Devil was cast down to the earth to torment those of us who inhabit it.

John describes the basis for that victory in **Revelation 12:10-11**:

*“10 Then I heard a loud voice in heaven say: ‘Now have come the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God, and the authority of his Messiah. For the accuser of our brothers and sisters, who accuses them before our God day and night, has been hurled down. 11 They triumphed over him **by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony...**” (NIV)*

Victory was only possible through the blood of the Lamb (Jesus), and the word of their testimony—very likely a reference to the power of God’s Word in Scripture. In our lives, Victory over the Devil will only be possible through these same means—the blood of Jesus and the power of his Word:

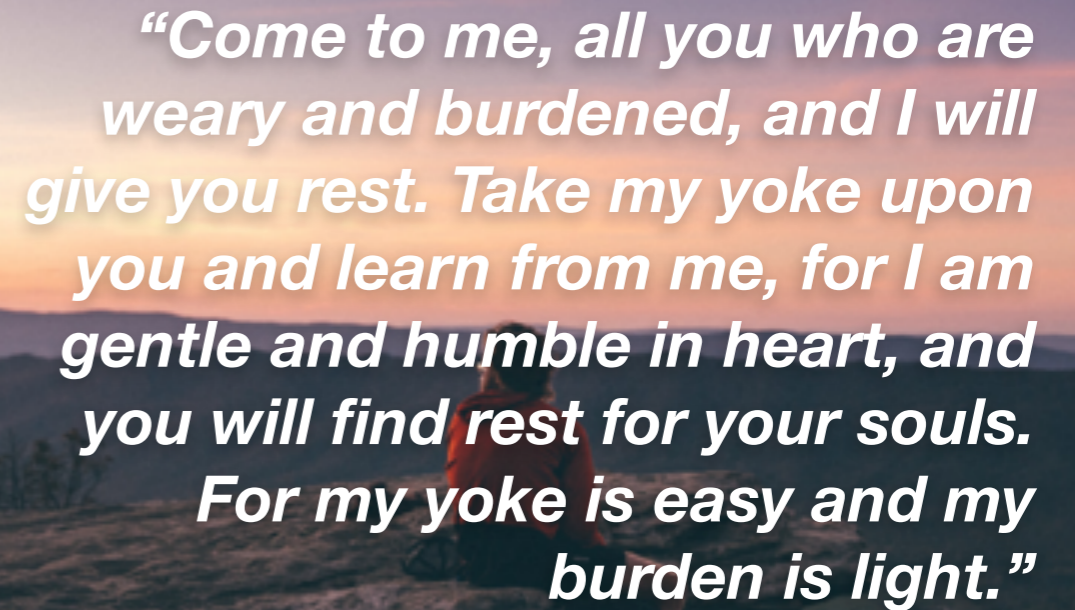
“He is the victor, and his followers prevail only because their master has made a way for them (cf. John 16:33); the Word of God lives in them (1 John 2:14), and the one who is in them ‘is greater than the one who is in the world’ (4:4).”

Robert Yarbrough, *1-3 John*, 276.

God’s Commands Are Not Burdensome.

As we return back to **1 John 5:1-5**, notice the second part of **5:3**, *“And his commands are not burdensome...”* There are many who would view the commands and rules in God’s Word as unwelcome limitations on their freedom, as restrictions on the life they’d like to live. Some approach Christianity and are turned off by all of the *“Thou Shalt Nots”* that they find. When viewed as a religion of rules, I’d have to admit that Christianity seems pretty off-putting.

But John argues that the commands of God are not burdensome (heavy, aggressive), because they are actually what gives us power to overcome our enemy, the Devil. **Revelation 12:17** contains the ominous conclusion to the Devil’s origin story: *“Then the dragon was enraged at the woman and went off to wage war against the rest of her offspring—those who keep God’s commands and hold fast their testimony about Jesus” (NIV).*



“Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.”

Matthew 11:28-30 (NIV)

Unable to defeat God directly, the Devil knows his only way of inflicting harm on God is by harming God’s children—especially those who live according to God’s Word.

The commands of the Bible are not burdensome, because the truly burdensome life would be the one lived in subjection to the Devil, with no power to fight against him.

With this larger view of our spiritual battle and the idea of victory in mind, the commands of the Bible are best viewed as a gift God gave us to help us in our fight, and not a list of rules he’s established to restrict all of our fun.

1 John 5:6-12—Can I Get a Witness?

“*Testimony*” or “*Testify*” appear 8 times in these seven verses, which helps establish that the major theme of **1 John 5:6-12** is the witness (or testimony) about Jesus. God has given us all the evidence we need to know and believe that Jesus is the Christ.

There is a very interesting bit of history about verses 7-8. Sometime in the middle ages, copyists added a very direct reference to the Trinity into verse 7. The King James Version of the Bible is most famous Bible that contains this addition: *“7 For there are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost: and these three are one.”*

The NIV and nearly all other translations of the Bible rightly do not include this added reference to the Trinity because it was simply not part of the original text. As nice as it would be to have a clear reference to the Trinity in one verse, this was a later addition to the Greek manuscripts which was not part of John’s original letter.

The real witnesses are the **Spirit**, the **Water** (symbolizing Jesus’ baptism), and the **Blood** (symbolizing Jesus’ death on the cross). Through these witnesses, we can be certain that Jesus is the Son of God who appeared in the flesh and died on the cross for the sins of the world.



The Spirit



The Water



The Blood

1 John 5:13-15—Message Received

John’s teaching on prayer is an echo of what Jesus teaches on prayer, namely that if we ask for anything in his name, according to God’s will, we will receive it. But there are two important qualifications John puts on that in this passage. First, it has to be according to God’s will. Second, the promise is that God hears us, not that he says yes right away.

If you ever feel like your prayers are simply conversations in an empty room, you can be confident in knowing that God hears every word. Sometimes God answers our prayers the way that we like, on the schedule we’d prefer. But perhaps more often than not, his answer or timing is different from what we prayed for. Nevertheless, there is comfort in knowing that God’s plan prevails, and that his plan is better than our best ideas.

Application

1 John 4:15-5:15 is a challenging call to love, and a powerful promise of the victory we have in Jesus. One way to put these verses into practice is to find victory in Christ by living according to his Word. The Bible is your best weapon against the attacks of the enemy. They are not optional assignments that you can pick and choose from, but necessary skills to learn in our spiritual battle.

Another way to put this into practice is to make love the foundation for everything else we do. God’s love is the basis for our faith, and the example we follow as we strive to love others. Faith alone is never enough. Obedience alone is never enough. But a love for God and a love for others might be the bridge that brings it all together. Whatever you do, do in love. Although this Bible Study is about the letter of 1 John, it seems apt to end this study with a brief verse from Paul: “Do everything in love” (**1 Corinthians 16:14, NIV**).