



Lesson 9 – Faith is the Victory

1 John 5:1-13

Imagine two friends are walking around a lake when they come across a boat that one of them built.

“What do you think of my masterpiece?” the first asks.

“Looks good!” the second responds.

“Wanna go for a ride?”

“Oh, um... probably not.”

“Don’t you believe it will work?”

“Yes, I believe it will, but I don’t believe that much!”

Churches are full of people who claim to believe God, but that claim ought to result in certain actions or it’s not really belief. In Greek, the word for “faith,” “trust,” and “believe/belief” are all based on the same root. In other words, believing God means trusting God, and having faith means we have trust. And you can’t trust God and then live a life that doesn’t trust Him.

John has spent much time talking about the importance of love. He will continue to do so, but in this section he turns his attention to another hugely important Christian concept: faith. Our Christian lives in many ways boil down to faith and love – believing God and then living out that belief by loving Him and loving others (cf Ephesians 1:15; 6:23; 1 Thessalonians 1:3; 5:8; 1 Timothy 1:14; 2 Timothy 1:13; Titus 3:15; Philemon 5; James 2:5). And faith will result in certain behavior and faith will have certain important results.

What other passages in Scripture tie together what we believe and how we behave?

What about instances where someone claims to believe God but continually disobeys Him?

As John zeroes in on the theme of faith, we will see him look at three aspects of faith: the difference that faith will make in our lives, the essence of what faith is, and the results of faith. In our lesson we will take a few moments to look at each of these themes individually.

I. The Practice of Faith: A life of faith is demonstrated by love and obedience (5:1-4).

We normally think of faith in purely intellectual terms. In other words, faith is something you think; it's certain facts that you accept as true. On this understanding, "believing in Jesus" means that I accept as true that Jesus was a real person, that He was God, and that He died on the cross for sinners. Now, all of that is important. Right doctrinal positions matter! John has taken a good portion of his letter arguing against false doctrine and warning that holding to false doctrine means that true regeneration has not taken place. But faith means that the facts floating around in our minds show up in our lives, or they aren't real faith (cf James 2:13-26). In this passage, John sees two important actions that flow from a right belief in who Jesus is.

A. Faith is shown by loving others (5:1)

John makes the point here that he has been making again and again throughout the letter: people who have been born again are different people. At the end of chapter four John argued that people who love God must also love other Christians.

B. Faith is shown by obeying God (5:2-3)

As John has done elsewhere in his letter, he finds himself coming back to theme of obedience, or as he often puts it "keeping God's commands." When we believe in Jesus, we will love others. We know that we love others when we love God, and we know that we love God when we obey God's commands. What are God's commands? Well, the command to love Him and others.

This connection between faith, love, and obedience is not unique to 1 John. It shows up quite frequently in Scripture.

Look up and discuss how the following verses contribute to this theme:

- ***John 15:15***
- ***James 2:14-17***
- ***Luke 6:46***
- ***Matthew 22:36-40***
- ***2 Timothy 1:13***

Our obedience and love for God and others comes from our faith in what God has said. Our faith in what God has said should manifest itself as love for God and others, especially as we seek to obey God's commands.

What happens if we isolate love from faith and obedience?

What happens if we isolate obedience from faith and love?

What happens if we isolate faith from love and obedience?

Are there places in your life where you claim to believe God but your actions would argue otherwise? How should someone go about fixing that problem?

II. The Content of Faith: A life of faith means trusting God's witness (5:5-13).

But what exactly are we called to believe? What is the content of our faith? If faith means trusting God, what are we trusting him about? Here John picks up the doctrinal issue he has been focused on all throughout the book: the deity and messiahship of Jesus.

A. Faith means believing Jesus' identity (5:1, 5).

John leads off this important discussion on faith by stating the bare necessity of what must be believed "Jesus is the Christ" (5:1). The word "Christ" here isn't a name so much a title. He is "the Christ," which is the Greek word for "Messiah." The group that John was doing theological battle with apparently thought highly of Jesus, but they didn't think he was truly the Messiah. Later, John states that believers must believe that Jesus is the Son of God (5:5). Putting these two concepts together, those who believe in Jesus must believe that He is the Messiah and the Son of God.

Why do you think a right understanding of Christ is so important for true faith? What about people who claim to believe the Bible but misunderstand who Jesus is?

As we have stated before, this does not mean only these two facts must be believed. John emphasizes these two principles of the faith because they are the ones currently under attack. The point is that there is a certain core of essential doctrines that must be believed by anyone who would claim to be a Christian.

B. Faith means believing the witness of God (5:6-10).

As we look at these verses, we see a word that shows up over and over again. In the Greek there is one root behind the words "testify, witness, record."¹

Consider asking your group in advance if they can spot the word(s). Warn them that there are three slightly related words. Then see if you can find all the occurrences as a group.

¹ This is the Greek word *martureo* from which we get our word martyr. Although a martyr came to have a more technical definition of someone willing to give their life, originally the word simply meant someone who testified or witnessed to something.

In other words, this is a huge theme of this section! God is bearing witness and testifying to the truth of who Jesus is throughout this section, and to fail to believe in who Jesus is calling God a liar. While most understand what it means that God the Father, Jesus Himself, and the Spirit bear witness to Christ, the language that John uses of blood, water, and Spirit is a challenging question. John begins this description in verse 6 and then resumes it in verse 8. So what exactly is John talking about with “water” and “blood”? How do these testify to Jesus’ status?

Although this very much debated, the best answer seems to be that “water” and “blood” refer to the baptism and the death of Jesus. At Christ’s baptism he went down in the “water” and was declared to be the Son of God (Matthew 3:16-17; Mark 1:9-11; Luke 3:21-22). The other witness would strangely enough be his crucifixion. Jesus’ death on the cross, the shedding of his “blood,” served as a propitiation that testified to his true nature (cf 1 John 2:1; 4:10). Combined then with both of these is the witness of the Spirit, who uniquely is said to testify of Jesus (cf John 15:26). At Christ’s baptism, death, and through the ongoing ministry of the Spirit, then, Jesus is constantly being witnessed to as the Son of God. Those who deny these are calling God a liar.

Why does the testimony of the Father and the Spirit to Jesus matter? How can this testimony be an encouragement to us today?

Who (what groups) deny these statements today?

III. The Result of Faith: A life of faith will be blessed by God (5:4-5, 11-13).

So what happens when we live a life of faith? If this is what we are called to, how does God reward those who choose to live by faith? In these verses we see at least two results of living a life faith.

A. The blessing of overcoming the world (5:4-5).

The first blessing John relates is that those who believe in Christ overcome, or conquer, the world. Earlier in his letter John has said that young men overcame Satan (1 John 2:13-14) and that they overcame false teachers (4:4). Now he is teaching that through the power of faith they can overcome the world.

What do you think it means to “overcome” or “conquer” these groups?

Satan wants to use false teachers and the system of the world around us to get us to fall and fail in our walk with God. It is only by clinging on to God in faith that we are able to successfully resist these attacks, and when we do that makes us overcomers.

How can believers successfully resist the world while also loving the world?

B. The blessing of eternal life (5:11-13).

Finally, those who overcome the attacks of Satan and the world and who live by faith will receive the promise of eternal life. The life that God promises us is the life of Christ, and by receiving Christ we receive this life. What does this life look like? One commentary gives the following descriptions from the gospel of John:

Consider looking these passages up first and having your group discuss what each verse teaches us about eternal life.

- “to have one’s spiritual hunger and thirst satisfied (John 4:14; 6:35);
- to be raised up on the last day and to live forever (John 6:40, 51, 54);
- to have the light of life so that one does not walk in darkness (John 8:12);
- to have abundant life (John 10:10);
- to know the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom he sent (John 17:3);
- and that, though we die, we will live (John 11:25).”²

What would such a life look like lived out by a Christian today? How is this life different from the life that those in the world have?

God’s Word gives us non-negotiable truths, truths that God has testified to and must be believed. Chief among these truths is the teaching about Jesus. Jesus is the long-awaited Messiah, not just for Israel but for the world. He is the Son of God, who is very God of very God. Groups in the time of John sought to deny these important truths and yet still fly under the banner of Christianity, as groups today do. The answer now is the same as the answer then: God is not a liar. His Word must be believed. Those who do will see a transformed life and will enjoy success against the spiritual onslaught of the world and life lived to the fullest, in the age to come but also here and now. Faith, truly trusting God and His promises, is the key for believers, because faith is the victory that overcomes the world.

² Colin Kruse, *The Letters of John*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: W.B. Eerdmans Pub., 2000), 187.