

9. Believing in the Son of God (3Q 2009—Loved and Loving: John’s Epistles)

Biblical material: Matt. 16:24, 25; John 1:1–3; 3:36; 5:24; Rom. 6:1–6; Heb. 12:4; 1 John 5:1-12.

Quotes

- A victory inside of us is ten thousand times more glorious than any victory can be outside of us. *Henry Ward Beecher*
- The more anyone excels in grace, the more he ought to be afraid of falling. *John Calvin*
- There can be no victory where there is no combat. *Richard Sibbes*
- The first step on the way to victory is to recognize the enemy. *Corrie ten Boom*
- God wants us to be victors, not victims; to grow, not grovel; to soar, not sink; to overcome, not to be overwhelmed. *William A. Ward*

Questions

How does trusting God “overcome the world”? How do we define victory when it comes to us, and in the issues of the great controversy? What really is faith—how do we reveal its true meaning? How are we “born of God”—and how would you explain this? What does the concept of being born again really imply?

Bible discussion

“And we win the victory over the world by means of our faith.” (1 John 5:4 TEV). To do so we must be single-minded, wanting to know only Christ, and him crucified. Can we say of ourselves: “I consider my life worth nothing to me, if only I may finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me—the task of testifying to the gospel of God’s grace.” (Acts 20:24 NIV). For Jesus describes what needs to happen very simply: “You must be born again” (see John 3:1-21). The idea of *rebirth* is central to Jesus message. It is not enough to be altered, changed, fixed up. The conversion that Jesus describes is so completely different, so totally transforming that only the image of being born again is sufficient. This term has been so over-used (and some would say abused) that it has lost much of its impact. But we need to react like Nicodemus, who responds in amazement—how can you return to your mother to be born all over again? This is what John echoes here as he says, “Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God” (1 John 5:1 NIV).

Birth is truly one of the greatest of human experiences—for mother, father and child—and all those around. The birth of our two children was an inspiring and moving experience for us. A baby—a brand new life! And that is what we are when we are born of God! Now we relate to God as Father, like a loving child—because of our acceptance of Jesus as Saviour and Lord.

Immediately the consequences of this new birth are spelled out—loving the father means loving the child. Families go together, says John, and the same applies to the spiritual family. You cannot love God without loving His children. How often Christians forget this when they get involved in the petty church squabbles over who plays the organ or who parked in which spot. How tragic that we should so quickly forget love for each other when we feel aggrieved—for whatever reason.

The truth Jesus came to unveil is that eternal life as one of God's children begins here and now. Not that this is a once for all experience. Just as we are born once but continue to be part of a family, so are we as part of God's family. "Everyone who really believes that Jesus is God's Christ is himself one of God's family" (1 John 5:1 Phillips). Only as we go on identifying with the family, with its shared experience and objectives can we truly be considered part of that family.

"For everyone born of God overcomes the world. This is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith." 1 John 5:4 NIV. Faith is not some object or substance. You cannot weigh faith by the pound, or measure it by the liter. Faith is a *relational* word: you have faith in someone (or something). You cannot simply "Have faith." It must always be faith *in*. More than that—faith is not some mystical unknown. Simply put, Biblical faith can be defined as trust in God. More than simple acceptance of God, it implies confidence in God, His trustworthiness and His saving ability.

So the phrase "our faith overcomes the world" becomes "our trust in God overcomes the world" which puts the emphasis back where it should be—not with us, but with the power and grace of God. We would all admit that to trust someone without having any reason or experience with them is extremely foolhardy. I would tell my children when they were small not to accept rides from strangers, not to take candy and so on. It's sad to have to restrict innocent trust, but in this evil world this is essential.

While we remember both "water and blood" at Christ's death as recorded by John, the more significant meaning of these symbols are in the context in which John is writing now. He was particularly concerned to counter the argument that Jesus was only a human being until his baptism, at which time Christ came down upon him and remained until shortly before his death. This theory was popular among those who believed that things physical were evil—for how could God be part of this evil world, and in particular become a human being? This is why John so explicitly states that "He did not come by water only, but by water and blood" (1 John 5:6 NIV).

Comments

"The initiative is entirely God's. He decides to manifest his love to those who do not love him and do not want to love him, to enemies and rebels armed to the teeth against him, to a world of lost sinners. Let us acknowledge once and for all that if it were not for the fact that God is love, we would have no expectation of mercy or forgiveness, no hope and no future. The initiative in the work of man's salvation belongs entirely to the God of love." David Jackman, The Message of John's Letters, Leicester, England and Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1988), 120.

Ellen White Comments

Our faith must rest upon evidence, not demonstration. Those who wish to doubt will have opportunity; while those who really desire to know the truth will find plenty of evidence on which to rest their faith. {SC 105}

Pardoning, redeeming love is brought to view in Christ Jesus. Satan had misrepresented the character of God, and it was necessary that a correct representation should be made to worlds unfallen, to angels, and to men. Satan had declared that God knew nothing of self-denial, of mercy and love, but that he was stern, exacting, and unforgiving... But in Christ we behold the character of the Father...{RH, March 9, 1897}

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