

# OVERCOMING THE WORLD

*SERIES: BELOVED EXILES: STUDIES IN 1 PETER*



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1 John 5:1-21

7th Message

Steve Zeisler

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This consideration of chapter 5 concludes our series of studies in the New Testament letter, 1 John. The first four chapters have displayed John's tenacity as a shepherd defending his flock against false teachers and shallow faith and concerns primarily arising from within the believing community.

Chapter five describes 'overcoming the world,' and assurance in prayer.

First, overcoming the world, 1 John 5:1-5

**<sup>1</sup>Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God, and everyone who loves the father loves his child as well. <sup>2</sup>This is how we know that we love the children of God: by loving God and carrying out his commands. <sup>3</sup>This is love for God: to obey his commands. And his commands are not burdensome, <sup>4</sup>for everyone born of God overcomes the world. This is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith. <sup>5</sup>Who is it that overcomes the world? Only he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God.**

The argument here is circular. Belief in Jesus indicates new birth; new birth expresses itself in love; love is evidenced by obedience. This obedience-in-faith overcomes the world. The one who overcomes, completing the circle, is the one who believes in Jesus. It is characteristic of John to describe the Christian life with its elements woven together.

In this study we will break out one of these connections. The one who is born of God overcomes the world. What does this statement say about our responsibilities as we live among unbelievers?

The word translated 'world' is cosmos. It can refer to the 'stuff' of the physical world. But here it describes a 'world view' of entrenched opposition to God. John's call to overcome the world will include resisting the

plans and pronouncements of proud rebels and rescuing some who are caught in the world system.

In an earlier message in 1 John 2:15-17 and will find more instructions to consider here.

1 John 2:15-17

**<sup>15</sup>Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. <sup>16</sup>For everything in the world—the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does—comes not from the Father but from the world. <sup>17</sup>The world and its desires pass away, but the man who does the will of God lives forever.**

This is not a call to physically separate from unbelievers. The challenge is: "do not love" (v. 15) what the world loves or craves what it craves. We cannot dabble with sin, as if love for God and love for the world can occasionally co-exist. These are patterns of life that are opposed to one another. One ceases and one endures.

There are three well known phrases in verse sixteen: two cravings and one exercise of pride.

Our bodies can lead us to what John calls the "the cravings of sinful man." Because we have a physical nature we will experience thirst, weariness, sexual longing, hunger, and other desires. A 'world view' that opposes God allows these desires to issue commands. Indulgence leads to an insatiable demand for more indulgence. Our bodies were made to bring us happiness and to honor God. The way of the world dismisses the hard choices that will allow us to discover these things.

The same is true with what John calls the "lusts of the eyes"—appetites of the mind and emotions. We want to be pampered and dazzled and stroked. Glitz

and glitter, joyless laughter, no restraints. As with physical appetites, all these experiences leave unsatisfied, demanding a fiercer jolt.

Finally, John identifies what he calls, “The boasting of what one has and does.” This is the allure of power and prominence. We want to be admired and obeyed, and yet worldly status is both unsatisfying and unstable, needing constantly to be defended.

The alternative to loving what the world loves is delighting in the love our Father has for us. A life that enjoys God and pleases him does not fade as all the promises of the world are destined to do.

We must not love the world, understood as pattern of cravings and rebellion. But we do love those in the world. The famous verse, John 3:16, reminds us that God loves the world, meaning the lost who are trapped by the false promises of pride and “the control of the evil one” (1 John 5:19). In addition to our turning from fleshly behavior, we overcome the world, break its power, by helping rescue some of its captives. We can let a light shine in acts of service and generosity so that seekers can find their way to forgiveness in the cross.

It helps to recall where we came from. “Remember that you were at that time separate from Christ, having no hope and without God in the world” (Ephesians 2:12). The Lord Jesus, in one of his clearest statements of self definition said, “The son of man has come to seek and save what is lost” (Luke 19:10). We cannot serve him without sharing his passion or the humility that comes from remembering our own rescue.

A clear directive of John in this letter is, “love one another.” Fleshly appetites become more voracious each time they are obeyed. Love is the opposite—it overflows. Love given away grows bigger. Sacrificial love in the church, creating an honest and healthy community does not make us ingrown, but strengthens love for outsiders, even love for enemies. One way we ‘overcome the world’ is by serving those who may come to faith in Christ. Love for fellow believers generates the power for greater service in the world.

In verses 6-12 of chapter 5, John returns to an earlier argument (contradicting the Gnostic false teachers). He insists that evidence from the physical world and the presence of the Spirit go together. Some elements of these verses are obscure. For this reason and because we need to press on to the end, we will proceed to John’s instruction on prayer beginning with verse 13.

1 John 5:13-15

**<sup>13</sup>I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life. <sup>14</sup>This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. <sup>15</sup>And if we know that he hears us—whatever we ask—we know that we have what we asked of him.**

Again we see a chain of relationships. Security begets confidence. Confidence leads to requests that are “according to his will.” These requests are heard and heard requests are answered. Prayer is not a technique, it is free communication in a loving relationship. His will become our desire, spoken from the heart in prayer. Recall the words of Charles Wesley “Bold I approach the eternal throne and claim the crown through Christ my own.”<sup>1</sup>

Verses 16-19 turn to the ministry of prayer in the church.

1 John 5:16-19

**<sup>16</sup>If anyone sees his brother commit a sin that does not lead to death, he should pray and God will give him life. I refer to those whose sin does not lead to death. There is a sin that leads to death. I am not saying that he should pray about that. <sup>17</sup>All wrongdoing is sin, and there is sin that does not lead to death. <sup>18</sup>We know that anyone born of God does not continue to sin; the one who was born of God keeps him safe, and the evil one cannot harm him. <sup>19</sup>We know that we are children of God, and that the whole world is under the control of the evil one.**

When Christians fail they should be restored by prayer and the loving concern of fellow believers. We do not shun those who stumble, rather we call on God to intervene, confident that children of God are not going to persist in sin.

The “sin that leads to death” (v. 16) likely refers to the apostate teachers John is confronting, those who are attempting to destroy faith in Christ and themselves are committing blasphemy. Though they make claims of Christian standing, they should not be considered genuine believers.

To conclude, this letter is about boldness. John, at an old age, has been fighting the good fight for a very long time. The gospel is at the center of what is worth fighting for. We should be bold in facing the evil one, whether he is seducing us or binding people we care about. We should be bold in refusing false testimony. We should be bold in approaching God in prayer and participating in the prayer of the church that others might be healed.

1 John 5:20-21

**<sup>20</sup>We know also that the Son of God has come and has given us understanding, so that we may know him who is true. And we are in him who is true—even in his Son Jesus Christ. He is the true God and eternal life. <sup>21</sup>Dear children, keep yourselves from idols.**

Amen.

#### NOTES:

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