

4. Is the preaching of love "soft pedaling" the Gospel? Explain.
5. What is the one command of God which cannot be counterfeited?
6. What is the difference between these two statements:
 (a) "I love Him because He first loved me."
 (b) "I love because He first loved me?"
7. How may I know who is my Christian brother?
8. What is the difference between being begotten and being born, in terms of entrance into the family of God?
9. Explain how "regeneration" covers both of these ideas.
10. Explain why the teaching that baptism is essential to salvation is not the same as teaching salvation by works.
11. Faith is always _____.
12. Divine love in God's children is not recognized by feeling but by _____.
13. If we learn to love our brothers, and practice this love, we may even learn to _____.
14. Explain how God's commandments are not distressing to one who loves Him.

CHAPTER XV

FAITH—THE POWER OF RIGHTEOUSNESS

I John 5:4-12

A. *The Text*

"For whatsoever is begotten of God overcometh the world: and this is the victory that hath overcome the world, even our faith. (5) And who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God? (6) This is he that came by water and blood, even Jesus Christ, not with the water only, but with the water and with the blood. (7) And it is the Spirit that beareth witness, because the Spirit is the truth. (8) For there are three who bear witness, the Spirit, and the water, and the blood: and the three agree in one. (9) If we receive the witness of men, the witness of God is greater: for the witness of God is this, that he hath borne witness concerning His Son. (10) He that believeth on the Son of God hath the witness in him: he that believeth not God hath made him a liar; because he hath not believed

in the witness that God hath borne concerning his Son. (11) And the witness is this, that God gave unto us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. (12) He that hath the Son hath the life; he that hath not the Son of God hath not the life."

B. *Try to Discover*

1. What does John mean by "overcome the world?"
2. How does faith that Jesus is the Christ enable one to overcome the world?
3. How does the Spirit testify that Jesus is the Son of God?
4. What should be the Bible believer's attitude toward textual problems such as the one found in some versions of I John 5:7(b)?
5. What has God testified concerning His Son?
6. Is it possible to have eternal life and not believe that Jesus is indeed the Christ, the Son of God? Explain your answer.

C. *Paraphrase*

"Because whatsoever hath been born of God overcometh the world; And this is the victory that hath overcome the world—Our faith. (5) Who is he that overcometh the world, Save he that believeth That Jesus is the Son of God? (6) This is he that came through means of water and blood Jesus Christ: Not by the water only But by the water and by the blood, And the Spirit it is that is bearing witness, Because the Spirit is the truth. (7) Because three there are who are bearing witness (8) The Spirit and the Water and the Blood; And the three are witnesses unto one thing. (9) If the witness of men we receive The witness of God is greater. Because this is the witness of God—In that he hath borne witness concerning his Son, (10) He that believeth on the Son of God Hath the witness within himself: He that doth not believe God False hath made him, Because he hath not believed on the witness which God hath witnessed concerning his Son—(11) And this is the witness: That life age-abiding hath God given unto us, And this life is in his Son: (12) He that hath the Son hath the life,—He that hath not the Son of God hath not the life."

D. *Comments*

1. Preliminary Remarks

In the late third or early fourth century A.D., a scribe who was copying this scripture probably inserted (in v.7) a sentence which reads, "for there are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost." (King James Version)

It is not within the scope of this present work to discuss the relative merits of this sentence. It is a matter of record that it appears first, not in the original Greek of the New Testament, but in the Latin translation. The earliest manuscript in which it appears in Greek is a copy made in the sixteenth century.

It is not needed to complete John's argument concerning the divine proofs of Jesus' identity as the Christ, the Son of God. Since we are following the text of the American Standard Version which omits this sentence, we shall not comment on it.

2. Translation and Comments

a. The source of Christian strength . . . v.4-5

(4) "For everyone having been begotten from God is overcoming the world. And this is the victory which gets the world overcome; our faith. (5) Who is the one overcoming the world if not the one believing that Jesus is the Son of God?"

"For" in this verse refers us back to 5:3. The reason the commands of God are not distressing to His children is that they *are* indeed His children. There is a power which comes through regeneration which is not available to the unregenerate. (Compare Acts 2:38-39 and Eph. 3:14ff) To put it bluntly, no one ever lived a Christian life without first becoming a Christian. There is a new kind of life to be had in Christ that is completely unknown outside of Him. It is identified with spirit rather than flesh.

The child of God is to expect victory. Much of the power of the early church found its source in this expectancy. They had stepped into a new kind of *life*, rather than merely adopting a new *religion*. The unseen things of eternity had become more real to them than the three dimensional materialism of this earthly existence. Friends marvelled at it, enemies trembled at it, and emperors went mad trying to understand the dynamic with which the first century Christians faced both *life* and *death*.

Most of the crisis which now face civilization result from the loss of this eternal awareness, and its accompanying power. Karl Marx looked about him at the downtrodden masses of Europe; hungry, miserable, defeated creatures, who for centuries had been communicants in the ritualistic sacerdotalism which passed for Christianity. He concluded that religion was to blame for most of the economic woes of a civilization dominated by "The Church."

In his *Communist Manifesto*, Marx declared the only path to meaningful fulfillment was to abandon Christianity for pragmatic, materialistic atheism. Religion, he said, is "the opiate of the people."

Much of what passes for Christianity today seems to support the creed of Karl Marx! The defeated, frustrated existence of the average church member does little to deny it. When the first glow of conversion has dimmed, we seem to soon forget that the inalienable birth-right of every born-again child of God is *victorious* life.

In our worship, the staid formalism has replaced heartfelt, awe. Spirit and reality so typical of the first century, also testifies against that for which it ostensibly stands. We have allowed the new life to become largely a spectator religion. We have placed faith in a liturgical straight jacket.

In the verses before us, John pin-points the source of power. It is our faith. Faith in the firm conviction that, in Jesus, the word of power by which God sustains the worlds, became flesh! It is a personal trust in Him that makes His power our own, His victory ours.

New Testament faith is more than mental assent to a proposition. It is more than mere belief. It is more than the acceptance of theological dogma or conformity to doctrine. Faith is the assurance of our hope; a conviction of unseen realities. (Cf. Hebrews 11:1) The child of God knows from experience that the real values of life, both here and hereafter, lie in an other-worldly realm. We are "not in the flesh, but in the spirit." (Romans 8:9) We no longer live "according to the course of this world," (Eph. 2:2) but according to the purpose and direction given those who are "looking ever to Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith." (Hebrews 12:2) As He "endured the cross, despising the shame," (Hebrews 12:2) so we learn in whatever our lot, "therein to be content" (Phil. 4:11). Not as those who have been stupefied by "the opiate of the people," but as those who know that whatever the outward circumstances of life, "in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him that loved us." (Romans 8:37)

The sons of God are not the victims of circumstance! When the eternal Word of God rose from the grave as a man, He demonstrated that God's love for His human children is inviolable. He gave Himself to us, both in body and in spirit. He conquered both life and death, and He has promised to be with us to the culmination of human history. (Cf. Matthew 28:20)

No power in either the seen or the unseen world can prevent us from being victorious *excepting our own failure to recognize that this is what He wants for us!*

The present world struggle with materialism in the guise of Communism will be won if Christians will recapture a real trusting awareness in Him Who came into the *seen* to demonstrate the reality of the *unseen*. It will be lost if Christians continue to cower before the great god Science and to believe the answer to materialistic communism is to be found in materialistic Americanism. We stamp the means of victory on our coins. We must stamp it on our hearts. "In God We Trust!"

b. The object of faith . . . v.6

(6) "This is the one who came through water and blood, "Jesus Christ; not in water only, but in the water and the blood,"

In the American revival which filled the church houses just following World War II, signs could be seen on every major highway entreating passersby to, "*find yourself through faith.*" Perhaps the revival proved to be more a bust than a boom because the signs failed to tell us "faith in what?"

Faith is not merely a positive attitude toward life. It is more than self-confidence. Faith must have an object. It is a trusting-awareness of that object.

The object of the Christian faith is a Galilean Carpenter, who, through certain phenomenal events in His life, was revealed to be the uniquely begotten Son of God; a visitor to this demension from another arena of activity. Of these phenomena, John selects two which suit the purpose of this epistle: His baptism and His death.

One form of gnosticism, propounded by the followers of a philosopher named Cerinthus, claimed that whatever was divine about Jesus came upon Him at His baptism and left Him on the cross. This John flatly denies. This One did not come *from* water to blood, that is, *from* His baptism *to* the cross. He came *through* both.

He was Deity incarnate before His baptism, and when He shed His

blood on the cross, He was still *God as man*. Otherwise, the death of Jesus loses its meaning. If Jesus was not God from the beginning, before His baptism, the Word was not *as man* but *in man* and Jesus' victorious life of obedience to God was a farce. If He did not remain God as man when He died, then God did not express His love to the world on Calvary.

c. Evidences of faith . . . v.7-10

(7) "And the Spirit is the one testifying, because the Spirit is truth. (8) For they are three, the ones testifying; the Spirit and the water and the blood; and the three are for the one thing. (9) If the testimony of men we are receiving, the testimony of God is greater; because this is the testimony of God, for He has testified concerning His Son. (10) The one believing in the Son of God is having His testimony in him. The one not believing God has made Him a liar because he has not believed in the testimony which God has testified concerning His Son."

To the evidence of Jesus' baptism and death, John now adds the testimony of the Spirit. Perhaps the most obvious allusion here is to the descent of the Spirit upon Jesus at His baptism. To the sceptic this is no evidence at all, but to the one who has been begotten of God and himself been anointed by the Spirit (See on I John 2:20) this argument is nearly conclusive in itself. It will never make sense to the one who thinks as a materialist, refusing to accept anything as real unless he can understand it through the physical senses. But the testimony of the Spirit is conclusive proof to the one who has learned from Christ that the realm of the spirit is the real world.

The testimony of all these three witnesses is for one thing: "That ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing ye may have life in His name." (John 20:31)

In our day the testimony of the Spirit includes not only our awareness that He is within us as well as His testimony throughout the life of Jesus; it includes the written word which He inspired John and the others to write.

Such evidence is also meaningless to the person who must subject everything to the test of human reason. Inspired scripture is unacceptable to one who will not believe what he cannot dissect in a laboratory or analyze chemically. But it is the precious proof to the one who is in tune with the infinite.

The attack of modern rationalism against the deity of Jesus began with

an attack on the *written* testimony of the Spirit. The claim that Jesus was a deceiver rather than a deliverer depends upon the destruction of Scriptural evidence to the contrary.

For this reason we are told that the Bible is a collection of forgeries and myths. No honest scholar can deny that the writings of the Scripture claim for Jesus exactly what the rationalist (as well as the gnostic) cannot accept; that He is God as man. Since this is obviously the claim of these writings, it becomes necessary to disprove the reliability of the writings themselves. To do so is to deny the inspiration, or to use John's term, the testimony, of the Spirit in the Bible, and especially the New Testament.

To the child of God, the most meaningful evidence available to prove the incarnate nature of Jesus is the testimony of the Spirit in written word.

John's statement, in verse 10, that the believer has God's testimony in him is another allusion to the presence of the Holy Spirit in the believer. Perhaps the greatest need among modern Christians, in this respect, is to realize that the Holy Spirit is not simply a divine influence, but a person. The Bible never refers to the Holy Spirit as "It", but always as "He" or "Him." The presence of this Divine Guest within our lives is evidence of the Deity of Jesus, for it was Jesus Who promised Him to us. (Cf. John 16:7-ff) It is upon obedience to Jesus that the Spirit comes to us. (Cf. Acts 2:38-39)

The person who does not believe that Jesus is the Incarnate Son of God has made the Spirit a liar. It is impossible to imagine any greater sin. It is impossible to imagine any more certain assurance of being eternally lost than this denial of what the Holy Spirit has claimed to be true. This is the epitome of self-worshipping egoism.

It is through the presence of the Holy Spirit in the life of the child of God that faith becomes power. Firm conviction, even personal trust, *alone* is not enough to bring about victory over what John calls the world.

Real victory comes through an acute awareness of unseen reality. The awareness must be deep-seated within the heart of a person. It is not something which can be understood academically and then clung to tenaciously in the face of apparent contradiction. Awareness of the kind necessary to give us victory over the limitations of physical senses is ours only when our trust opens our hearts and allows the Divine Repre-

sentative to live in us. One is less likely to doubt the reality of spiritual life when the Spirit Himself is his constant companion.

To put it another way, a great deal of our failure to overcome the world is our inability to keep to the spiritual point of view. We can see and feel and smell the things of the world. The awareness of temporal values is so strong we seem ever able to rationalize the control they have over our behavior. Only when, through faith, the unseen is constantly real because the Holy Spirit is in us, can we overcome the inclination to act as though the physical world were more real than the spiritual.

Perhaps a word of caution is needed here. The distinction drawn between the seen and the unseen as well as the insistence that the spirit demension is "more real" than the physical are for the sake of blasting away the scales from our spiritual eyes. We must not be deluded into believing a dualism in which the physical is separate from and irreconcilable to the spirit. This was the fundamental error of gnosticism.

What we must realize is the meaning of victory over the world. The physical is intended to be the servant, not the master. The body is to be used as a dwelling place of the soul. The physical senses are the means by which we maintain contact with the present environment. We simply must not let "the tail wag the dog" by reversing the divine order. This we do when the world, with its materialistic values, rather than God's Spirit, becomes the motivating force of our lives.

Although John does not deal with the matter directly, he has laid down the reason God requires His children to give money to the church as an act of worship. It is not "as though He needed anything." (Acts 17:25) Rather, we are required to give for our own good, because in so doing we learn to subject material values to spiritual. As Jesus put it, "where your treasure is, there will your heart be also." (Matthew 6:21)

d. The testimony identified . . . v.11-12

(11) "And this is the testimony, that life eternal God gave to us, and this life is in His Son. (12) The one having life; the one not having the Son of God is not having life."

That to which the witnesses testify, indeed the entire message of the Bible, is brought into sharp focus in these verses. God gave us eternal life; eternal life is in His Son, those, and only those, having the Son have eternal life.

There is no hesitancy, no philosophical "perhaps." The issue is life and death. The declaration is straightforward and simple.

Nothing is more needful today than the reiteration of this same vital truth. The institutionalized church, muscle bound by over-organization and flabby from too much material wealth, has offered to the world a cheap substitute for this faith, and a counterfeit for the life only this faith can bring.

The materialistic rationalism so prevalent among today's protestant theologians has done nothing to restore the life-giving power of the Gospel to its rightful position as the focal point of the Christian message.

Stripped of its liturgical and creedal straight jacket, and purged of the nauseous egoism represented in materialistic, rationalistic theology, the Gospel, God's glad news of life, is still the power of God unto salvation to all those who believe!

E. *Questions for Review*

1. Why is the statement concerning the three witnesses which is found in the King James Version of I John omitted from more recent versions? (v.7)
2. Why are the commands of God not distressing to the children of God?
3. What is the source of victorious power in the life of a Christian which is not available to the world?
4. How does the life of the "average church member" today support the doctrine of Karl Marx that "religion is the opiate of the people?"
5. Give a definition of "faith" as John uses the word in I John 5:4.
6. Explain the statement, "The sons of God are not the victims of circumstance."
7. Faith must have an _____. It is not just a positive attitude toward life.
8. One form of Gnosticism called Cerenthic claimed that whatever was divine about Jesus came upon Him at _____ and left Him at _____.
9. What is John's answer to this claim?
10. The Spirit and the water and the blood all testify to one thing. What is the purpose of their testimony?

11. In our day, the testimony of the Spirit includes the _____ as well as His testament in the life of Jesus and His presence in our own lives.
12. In order for rationalism to destroy belief in the deity of Jesus it must first destroy the _____ of Scripture.
13. The person who does not believe in the deity of Jesus as the Incarnate Son of God has made the Spirit a _____.
14. Real victory over the world comes from faith which gives us a constant awareness of _____.
15. A great deal of our failure to overcome the world comes from our inability to keep to _____.
16. To have victory over the world is to make _____ the master and _____ the servant.
17. How does our giving to the church aid in our overcoming the world in our personal lives?

CHAPTER XVI

HEREBY WE KNOW

I John 5:13-21

A. *The text*

"These things have I written unto you, that ye may know that ye have eternal life, even unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God. (14) And this is the boldness which we have toward him, that, if we ask anything according to his will, he heareth us; (15) and if we know that he heareth us whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions which we have asked of him. (16) If any man see his brother sinning as sin not unto death, he shall ask and God will give him life for them that sin not unto death. There is a sin unto death: not concerning this do I say that he should make request. (17) All unrighteousness is sin: and there is a sin not unto death. (18) We know that whosoever is begotten of God sinneth not; but he that was begotten of God keepeth himself, and the evil one toucheth him not. (19) We know that we are of God, and the whole world lieth in the evil one. (20) And we know that the Son of God is come, and hath given us an understanding, that we know him that is true, and we are in him that is true, even in his Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God and eternal life. (21) My little children, guard yourselves from idols."