

Sermon Series: Flourishing Fellowship with God: A Study in 1 John

Sermon Title: Flourishing Fellowship Practices Confidence in Crisis.

Scripture: 1 John 5:1–12

Opening:

- Pre-Introduction: The confidence of the trinitarian testimony in my own life and crisis — Hadlee Jean and Jaxon Wayne Howe
- Main Introduction: Review messages on Flourishing Fellowship:
 - Maximizes Joy by Walking in the Light
 - Trades Plateaued Living for the Pathway of Obedience
 - Harbors (Makes Port) in Christ's Light and Love
 - Tests the Spirits by Consistent Confession and Conduct
- Sub-Introduction: Context and Message
 - Context: Remember the situation that concerns John regarding the division over Christology and love that has caused a crisis in the church(es).
 - Message: Practice Confidence in Crisis.

Need: Overcome the world

Subject: The trinitarian testimony

Biblical Idea: The trinitarian testimony overcomes the world.

Outline of the Text:

- The one born of God overcomes the world by a faith in Jesus Christ characterized by love and obedience (vv. 1–5).
 - New birth connected to faith that Jesus is Christ (v. 1a).
 - John instructed that those who have been born from the Father are those who believe that Jesus is the Christ.
 - “Everyone” is qualified by the relative (participial) clause, “who believes that Jesus is the Christ.”
 - The aspect of the present tense verb “believes” invites the reader inside to see the ongoing belief. It is in the indicative mood, the mood of reality, not potential.
 - The content of believe is something about Jesus. The believer believes that the Jesus whom the apostles saw, heard, looked upon, touched,

and proclaimed is the Christ— “fulfiller of Israelite expectation of a deliverer, the Anointed One, the Messiah.”¹

- This qualified “everyone” has been fathered. The emphasis is God has become their Father. He has exercised the role of fatherhood for those who believe that Jesus is the Christ. This also means that the opposite is also true—God is not the Father of those who do not believe that Jesus is the Christ.
- The verb “has been born” (ESV), “is born” (NASB), “has been born” (NRSV), “is born” (NIV), “has been fathered” (NET), “is born” (NKJV), “is born” (KJV) comes to us from the Greek word γεννάω. In the English translations you’ll notice that some use “has been” and others “is.” The translators are wrestling with how to best convey the aspect of the perfect tense of the verb. The perfect tense communicates an action that was completed at a point in the past that has continuing results in the present. A writer may wish to emphasize either the completed act (“has been born”) or the continuing results (“is born”). I agree with the ESV, NRSV, and NET Bibles on this, which place the emphasis on the completed action at a point in the past because the present participial phrase “who believes that Jesus is the Christ” answers for the reader what the continuing results having been born of God should be in the present.
- The verb “has been born” is also a passive. The one who has been born in this way did not father himself or herself. The prepositional phrase provides the necessary information about the origin or source of this birth—it came “from God.”
- New birth connected to love (v. 1b).
 - “And” communicates the coordination of thought from the previous content to the content that follows.
 - “Everyone” is qualified again by a relative (participial) clause—“who loves the Father.” Again, the participle “loves” is present, active, and indicative, which conveys the ongoing, present reality of the love.
 - The object of the love is the Father.
 - This qualified everyone who loves the Father “also loves.” There is a tandem, ongoing reality to this love. It loves two objects – the father and “the one who has been fathered from God.” Here, again, we have

¹BDAG, s.v. “Χριστός,” 1091.

an extensive perfect “has been fathered” reaching back to emphasize the completed action that caused the present, ongoing reality of this love. John consistently uses the passive for γεννάω and follows it again with a prepositional phrase to identify the source of the fathering—“from him.”

- Love connected to obedience (v. 2–3).
 - “By this” will be explained later in the sentence with the content that follows the conjunction “when.”
 - “We know” is present, active, and indicative and conveys the reality that from writer’s perspective they had arrived at a point of knowledge.
 - The content of this knowledge is “that we love the children of God.” The verb “love” is present, active, and indicative observing the ongoing reality of this love. The
 - The object of this love is “the children of God.”
 - In a declaratory fashion instead of a Q&A style, John is answering how we can know if we or another person loves God’s children. He gives a twofold declaration by which this reality can be tested:
 - First, “when we (may be) are loving God.
 - Second, “when we (may be) are doing his commandments.
 - Each of the verbs are subjunctives, which present potential realities. Therefore, “by this” we know that we love the children of God: if or when we are loving God and if or when we are doing God’s commandments.
 - In verse three, love continues to be connected to obedience by an explanatory sentence introduced by the word “For.”
 - The demonstrative pronoun “this” will be explained and clarified later in the sentence following the conjunction “that.” But first John states something about “this”—it is the love of God.” The verb “is” equates “this” and “the love of God.”
 - He clarifies “this” in the subordinate clause “that we (may) continue keeping his commandments. The verb “keep” stresses the continual nature of the action and its potential. Its mood is not the mood of reality, but of potential (subjunctive).
 - Next, John makes a statement about the nature of God’s commandments. He states that God’s commandments are not “burdensome.”

- The Greek term is βαρύς. It appears in the Greek Old Testament 46 times (Gen. 48:17; Ex. 17:12; 18:18; Num. 11:14; 20:20; 1 Sam. 4:18; 5:11; 1 Kings 3:9; 10:2; 12:4, 11; 2 Kings 6:14; 18:17; 2 Chr. 9:1; 10:4, 11; 25:19; Neh. 5:18; *1 Mac. 1:17, 20, 29; 3 Mac. 3:1; 5:1, 30, 47; 6:5, 33; 4 Mac. 4:5*; Psa. 35:18; 38:4; Prov. 27:3; Job 6:3; 15:10; 23:2; 33:7; *Wis. 2:14; 17:20; Sir. 29:28; 31:2; 40:1*; Nah. 3:3; Dan. 2:11). It is used 6 times in the New Testament: Matt. 23:4, 23; Acts 20:29; 25:7; 1 John 5:3; 2 Cor. 10:10. In sum, it conveys a literal or metaphorical heaviness or weightiness. It can also refer to a source of difficulty or trouble because of demands being made and so convey the ideas of severity or burden. Positively, it can refer to the unique or “unusual significance”² of something. Finally, it can speak of a fierce or cruel temperament. Therefore, John most likely meant that God’s commandments are not difficult nor troublesome. They are not severe or an unbearable burden. They are not fierce nor cruel. It seems he wants to dispatch these negative connotations from are thinking about God’s commandments.
- New birth connected to victory (vv. 4–5).
 - John doesn’t elaborate further about his statement on God’s commands; instead, he moves on to connect being fathered by God and victory.
 - “Everyone” is again qualified by a relative (participial) clause—“who has been born from God.”
 - These “overcome.” The noun form of this verb is where the brand Nike gets its name. The verb can mean to prevail, to win by overcoming obstacles, to be the victor in battle or in legal action; it can mean to vanquish or overcome. It can also mean to surpass in ability, to excel. Its form conveys that John meant us to understand this as an ongoing reality for the one who has been born of God. It isn’t a potential reality; it is reality—a real ongoing experience by those fathered by God.
 - The object of the verb is “the world.” Here again in First John, I believe it represents that hostile system originated by the evil one at work in the world in rebellion toward God and filled with the things of

² BDAG, s.v. “βαρύς,” 167.

the world—the desires of the flesh, the desires of the eyes, and the arrogance associated with the accumulation and hoarding of material goods.

- As he did earlier about the love of God in verse three, John makes a statement here in the second half of verse four about the victory.
- “This” will receive clarification, this time, through apposition.
- “Is” equates the subject “this” with the predicate nominative “the victory.”
- “The victory” is further modified in two ways:
 - First, the victory is that which has overcome the world. In “has overcome” gives us John’s perspective from an external vantage point because he uses the aorist aspect for the participle. He conveys simply that the victory over the hostile world has happened.
 - Second, he clarifies “this” by using “our faith” in apposition to “the victory.” In other words, our faith is the victory that has overcome the world.
- In verse 5, John returns to where he began in verse 1—belief in Jesus. Here, our faith is connected to overcoming the world.
- He does this by asking a question, “Who is the one who overcomes the world?” The verb looks at the present, internal, ongoing reality of overcoming now rather than the external vantage point of our victory having occurred. Who is the one who overcomes daily in the world—we might ask?
- John tells his readers: “except the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God.” Earlier John presented Jesus as the object of our faith by identifying him as the Christ, the anointed Son of David, the hope of Israel’s deliverance. Here, he identifies the same Jesus as the Son of God. Who is it that came in the flesh? John’s answer is that Jesus is both Lord and Christ. He is the eternal Son of God and the incarnate David Messiah. This same one is the one who was crucified, to which he now turns in verses 6–10.
- In these first five verses, John begins with faith in Jesus and ends with faith in Jesus. This faith is foundational to our love, to our obedience, and to our victory over the world.
- The trinitarian testimony concerning Jesus and his cross is **eternal** life (vv. 6–12).
 - The one coming by water and blood (v. 6a–b)

- Verse 6 begins with the pronoun “this one.” About whom is John writing? In verses 1–5, we have learned that he is speaking about Jesus who is the Christ, who is also the Son of God. This is he.
- Therefore, this Jesus “is,” which functions to further identify him with what comes after the “is.”
- He is “the one who came.” This participle is actually in the present tense, which we would normally translate as “the one who is coming.” However, an author may use the present to speak of a past event more vividly. It is frequently found in narrative literature, especially in John’s Gospel and often with this verb *ἔρχομαι*. While 1 John is not a narrative—it is a letter—I believe John desires his readers to recall something specific from his narrative. Look at John 19:31–37. Therefore, the exact coming that John has in mind here is not his incarnation, but his death on the cross, a death verified by both water and blood when the spear tore at the Savior’s side. Here, John makes the connection between Jesus, the Son of God, and Jesus, the Christ, and Jesus, the one who came through water and blood, that is to say, the one who died on the cross. This is a dynamically structured declaration of the one person, who is both the Son of God and the Christ, who must have had a real body and a real human death. And only this one can be our Advocate. Only this one can be the propitiation for our sins. Only this one can define Christian love and obedience. And only this one provides the victory over the hostile world system. Do you know him today?
- Burge holds that water and blood refers to Jesus’ baptism through to his death (i.e., the entirety of his ministry). He writes, “It is Jesus’ sacrificial death—not his incarnation alone—that gives life: not by water only, but by water *and blood*.”³ Regardless of whether you think “water and blood” is a reference to his full ministry from baptism through the cross or to the cross alone, the point is that John (and the Spirit and the Father) testified to the “Life and truth [that] can only be found when a complete incarnation embraces a genuine death on the cross.”⁴
- The testimony of the Spirit (v. 6c–8)
 - In these verses, we find the testimony of the Holy Spirit.

³ Burge, *The Letters of John*, 202.

⁴ Burge, *The Letters of John*, 202.

- The Spirit agrees with the testimony of the “water and blood,” that is, from my perspective, the Holy Spirit agrees with the testimony of Jesus and his cross (Heb. 9:14 and in the quotations of Psalms from the cross).
- John writes that the Spirit’s testimony can be trusted because he is the Spirit who identifies with the truth.
- Verse 7–8 presents to us a difficult textual issue. Let us compare the KJV and the ESV.
 - KJV: “For there are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost: and these three are one. And there are three that bear witness in earth, the Spirit, and the water, and the blood: and these three agree in one.”
 - ESV: “For there are three that testify: the Spirit and the water and the blood; and these three agree.”
- Why is there such variation between the two?
 - The simple answer is that our earliest manuscripts give us a reading that the ESV translators have captured. The KJV retains a reading that came about much later in history and has an inconsistent form.
 - To give a little more context, we see variations of the KJV reading in marginal notes of manuscripts only as early as the tenth century. It continues to be found in marginal notes in through the fourteenth century. It doesn’t appear in the text of First John until the fourteenth century. The form of this later addition also isn’t consistently the same across the manuscripts that have it. Therefore, I believe the ESV and translations like it that leave out the additional text have captured the original text of First John.
- The important point in verses 7–8 is that the Holy Spirit agrees with the testimony of the “water and blood” of Jesus.
- The testimony of the Father (vv. 9–10)
 - Even without the additional text, we find the trinitarian testimony because the Father’s testimony agrees with that of the Spirit and the “water and the blood.” The Father’s testimony is greater than the testimony of men, perhaps a reference to the those who had departed from the church with a false Christology.
 - John ends this section in verse ten with a comparison:

- The one who believes in the Son of God carries this trinitarian testimony with him.
- The one who does not believe the trinitarian testimony has made God a liar because he does not believe the testimony of the Trinity about the Son of God.
- The life and guarantee of the trinitarian testimony (vv. 11–12)
 - The life
 - The trinitarian testimony about Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who came and died is agreed upon by the Spirit and the Father.
 - It is eternal life (cf. John 17:3).
 - Eternal life is in the Son, Jesus.
 - The guarantee
 - Positively, the one who has this Son has this life.
 - Negatively, the one who does not have this Son does not have this life.

Theological Tension: The hostile world system has never been neutral about Jesus Christ. This system at work in the world makes God a liar by rejecting the trinitarian testimony about the Savior. It always seeks or creates alternative saviors and lords.

Theological Truth: God's testimony about Christ and his cross has always been the life that overcomes the world.

Theological Purpose: To encourage overcoming confidence in Christ's cross for church crises.

Make It Personal: Practice confidence in crisis.

- Practice faith in crisis.
- Practice love in crisis.
- Practice simple obedience in crisis.
- Practice victory in Jesus in crisis.
- Practice receiving God's testimony in crisis.
- Practice living eternally in crisis.