

THE EPISTLES OF 1, 2, & 3 JOHN
RWANDAN PASTOR'S CONFERENCE
SESSION V
FINAL REMARKS 1 JOHN
1 JOHN 5:1-21

Now we open the final chapter of John's letter in 1 John. We are going to examine this chapter in three sections. First in v.1-5, we will see the Apostle describe the great victory every believer has through faith in Jesus Christ as Lord. Secondly, in v.6-12 John expounds once again on a testimony concerning who Jesus Christ was and what he did. Finally, in v.13-20 the Apostle will close his letter with another presentation of the great certainties and assurances we have as followers of Christ.

So, let's get started:

v.1-5:

One of the primary resources I used in preparing this course was the New American Commentary volume on 1,2,3 John. This volume was written by Dr. Daniel Akin who is now the president of Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary in Wake Forest North Carolina. In his section on v.1-5 he included a schematic revealing the poetic nature of these verses that I wanted to share with you because I think it really helps us to pull the meaning out of the text:¹

A- *"the one who believes that Jesus is the Christ" (5:1a)*

B- *"is born of God" (5:1b)*

C- *"love those born of the Father" (5:1c)*

C'- *"love the children of God" (5:2)*

B'- *"everyone born of God" (5:4)*

A'- *"the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God" (5:5)*

In v.1-2 we see the Apostle doing a couple of things. First of all, he is repeating the clear position that it is those people who believe that Jesus is the Christ; they are the ones who are born of God. John has made this point a couple of times already in chapter 4. But notice here that there is a slightly different emphasis on John's message here. **Do you see his emphasis in v.1??**

No doubt John is letting everyone know that belief in Jesus Christ is necessary to be born of God. However, John's real emphasis here is in how this faith is manifested in the life of the

believer. Our faith is more than just a mental assent. There is an ethical or behavioral component that goes along with that faith.

Think of it like this: I can know that my friend is wonderful farmer. I can realize that he grows beautiful crops and nurtures his fields with great care. But this really doesn't have anything to do with how I live my life as a businessman. None of my daily decisions are driven from my knowledge of my friend. However, this is NOT the case when it comes to our faith in Christ. We not only know that he is the Savior of the world, John is stressing that our daily lives and actions will be affected by this knowledge!! That is John's emphasis in v.1-2. When one knows Christ as Lord, and places his faith in Him, that person's life is changed. The change comes from God and is manifested in the life of the person outwardly as love for others.

V.3 gets very interesting. **Re-read this verse to yourselves and tell me what you think.**

It is a familiar tactic of John to link our love for God with our obedience toward Him. John Stott, one of the great pastors of the 20th century commented this on v.3: "*Love for God is not an emotional experience so much as a moral commitment.*"² The Apostle John frequently linked our love for God with the keeping of His commands in his Gospel (John 14:5; 21; 23-24; 31; 15:10).³ In 14:5 Jesus says, "*If you love me, you will obey what I command*". Notice next in v.3, that John says God's commands are not burdensome. **Is John saying that it is "easy" to be a Christian??**

I do not think that is quite his message here. Sin is a terrible condition and it has a terrible grip on all of us. We know that even as believers we struggle daily with temptation. What the Apostle is telling us is that despite this struggle, obeying God's commands is not an oppressive or crushing thing to do. Remember, John is focusing here on the command to "*love*". He has already demonstrated that the source of love is God. Thus God is seen as supplying the very thing that He is commanding His followers to do. See how this matches up with how God works. Now matter how difficult or daunting a task may seem, God always supplies to His people what they need in order to accomplish His sovereign will.

For me, v.4 is one of those verses that simply says it all in just a few words. I am not Tanzanian, therefore I do not speak Swahili, so I am unsure if your language struggles with this verse the way that my native English does. I want to show you some very powerful things in this

verse that demonstrate its power. First of all, this is the eighth time that John has employed the perfect tense in relation to being “*born*” of God. He will do so a total of 9 times in this letter (2:29; 3:9 twice; 4:7; 5:1 three times; 5:4; 5:8).⁴ **Remind me again of what we said was the importance of the perfect tense and how that applies to being “*born of God*”?**

Remember, John is stressing the ongoing nature of conversion. We are not simply “*converted*” at some point in our lives. Instead the perfect tense tells us that this is a conversion whose effects carry forward into the very present.

The second thing I want to point out here in v.4 is how my native language struggles with interpreting this verse from the original Greek. In English the verse reads: ⁴ *For everyone who has been born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world — our faith.* I underlined three words, two verbs and one noun. The verbs are translated in English as some form of “*overcome*”. The noun is translated as “*victory*”. Different words, with similar thoughts being conveyed. **Tell me if this is the same in your language..??**

I will tell you that in the original language, the words are from the same root term. Daniel Akin demonstrates how this verse reads when translated in that fashion:⁵ *For everyone born of God conquers the world. This is the conquering that has conquered the world, our faith.* In English this is a bit awkward in speech, but perhaps a more accurate way to reveal the meaning.

Finally, in v.4 we see exactly what it is that allows us to “*conquer*” the world: “*our faith*”. Our simple faith in Jesus as the Christ is what makes us born of God and have victory over this fallen world. The victory is ours, but it is ours because Jesus first won it for us!! It is not our “works”, it is the work of Jesus. Look at how this concept ties in with Paul’s message in Ephesians 2:8-9.

In v.5, John unpacks exactly what this faith is by continuing his theme on believers overcoming the world. He does this in such a simple and straight-forward way. First he asks a rhetorical question regarding just “*who*” overcomes or conquers the world? He clearly knows the answer, and by this point in the writing, so should every reader understand. The one who overcomes the world is the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God!! This reminds me of Jesus’ words in John 14:6 - “*Jesus said to him, " I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."*”

TESTIMONY TO THE SON – 5:6-12

John is now going to turn to the great testimony that we have proving Jesus is the Son of God. Here in this section he is going to focus upon the period between Jesus' baptism and crucifixion. This is another point of evidence that John was battling early forms of Gnosticism.

v.6-8:

As we open this section on the proof that John offers regarding Jesus, he begins with a statement that can be difficult to understand. John says that Jesus Christ came “*by water and blood*”. **What are your thoughts here on John's meaning of “water and blood”??**

Over the years there have been several thoughts on what John is speaking of here. However, among these, one position is supported by the vast majority of Christian scholars. This position contends that John's references to “*water and blood*” actually represent the terminal points of Jesus' earthly ministry. His ministry ***began*** with his baptism in the ***water*** of the River Jordan. His earthly ministry ***concluded*** at the crucifixion where his ***blood*** was shed for all.⁶ Remember now, the false teachers deny the incarnation of the divine Jesus. Some forms of the Gnostics would acknowledge that when Jesus was baptized, the divine Son of God entered the man Jesus at that moment. They all deny that Jesus actually went to the cross. In these three verses John is slapping down all of their false teachings at once!! The divine Christ went into the River Jordan to be baptized, “*he came by water*”. This same divine Jesus died on that bloody cross at Golgotha!!

Additionally, John adds that not only did Christ come by virtue of the water and blood, but the Spirit of God is the witness to all of this. Then notice that it is all three of these that provide testimony to the reality of Jesus' ministry and sacrificial death for mankind.

v.9:

John uses a common comparison device to stress his point here. John is making an argument “*from lesser to greater*”. Notice how he basically says “*if you can believe what a man says (the lesser), then how much more can you believe what God says (the greater)?*” This is a very straight-forward verse. John is simply stressing that the testimony he is presenting on Jesus is the testimony of God, regarding Jesus. Nothing can be more trustworthy!!

v.10:

Now this is a really interesting verse. Once again we see the familiar comparative style of the Apostle as he contrasts “*the one who believes*” from “*the one who does not believe*”. The first point I want to make on this verse is that John uses a type of word for each of these types of people that denotes that their state of belief (or disbelief) is a continuous thing.

Secondly, notice that the one who believes has the testimony of Jesus Christ “*in himself*”.

What do you think John is trying to say with that statement??

When we come to Christ, the Holy Spirit comes to reside within our hearts. We know from the testimony of the Spirit speaking to our hearts constantly, that Jesus is our Lord and Savior. It is the testimony of God, but it is within the very heart of every believer!!

Third, in the section concerning the one who does not believe, John uses three examples of the perfect tense in two sentences to stress his point. The first example is regarding this person “*has made*” *God a liar*. In this phrase the word “has made” is in the perfect tense and is stressing that this person didn’t just “make God a liar” in the past. This person ***continues*** to make God a liar to this very day. The second example is regarding the phrase “*because he has not believed*”. In this phrase the word for not believed stresses this person’s state of disbelief is continuing into the very present moment. The third and final example is on the phrase “*the testimony that God has borne concerning his Son.*” In this phrase John uses the perfect tense to demonstrate that God didn’t simply testify about the Son during his earthly ministry. NO!, God is actively continuing to testify about the Son to this very present moment!!

v.11-12:

Verse 11 says it all. John is simply a master at very plainly presenting the true essence of the gospel message in a way that all people are capable of comprehending. A person does not have to spend 20 years of their life in school in order to understand the gospel message and come to Christ in faith. John makes that fact abundantly clear here in v.11

He opens the verse with the phrase “*And **this** is the testimony of God,,*” **What is John referring to with the word “this”??**

He is referring to what he is about to say. He is effectively saying: “*Listen to me now. **This** is the heart of the message from God....*” So the “this” in the opening phrase is referring to

fact that God has given us ***eternal life***!! Not only has He given us eternal life, but He tells us in the final phrase that this eternal life can only be attained from His Son.

In v.12 John removes any doubt that could arise from the last phrase of v.11. Effectively he is restating the last phrase of v.11 and tying it to belief (and disbelief) as seen in v.10. He ties the eternal life that comes from the Son to the belief he noted in v.10. Furthermore, he contrasts this by showing that the person who does not believe in the Son, will not have eternal life.

THE CONFIDENCE OF BELIEVERS – 5:13-20

Brothers, there is one word in these passages that should just glare out at us and help us to understand exactly what the Apostle is trying to say. What is that word??

John uses the term “***know***” seven times in these 8 verses!! When a biblical writer goes to the trouble to repeat a word over and over again in his text, it is almost certain that he is trying to stress that point. John is using the verb form of “*know*” not the noun form. This tells us that what is in play is the action of “*knowing something*”. It is not just some abstract concept of “*knowledge*”. It is the real world act of actually doing something. In this case what “we do” is “we know!! Furthermore, when we look at the original language, we once again see John using the very important perfect tense with this action word. Just like we have witnessed so many times, the Apostle is employing the notion that this “*knowing*” is something that we have come to do in the past, but the impacts and importance of this action is carrying forward with us to this moment. Six of the seven uses of “*know*” in v.13-20 are in the perfect tense.

Let’s get into this closing section of the first epistle:

v.13:

If I asked you to tell me what John is doing here in v.13, what would you say??

Scholars are in near total agreement that this verse is the actual “*purpose statement*” for the entire book. John shifts back into the first person by saying “***I*** write these things to you,,,”. He gave us hints of his purpose in 1:4 (“*so that your joy may be complete*”) and 2:1 (“*so that*

you will not sin”). The verse is quite similar to his purpose statement in the Gospel of John 20:31.

Exactly what is John’s purpose here in 1 John??

Absolutely no question here; John is writing to make sure that his readers (and every believer who reads these words) *will know with total and complete certainty* the fate of their eternal souls!! Tie this in with how he has just completed the previous section in v.6-12 and we have a very clear context of what John is saying.

v.14-17:

Sometimes when I approach this passage I have to admit I can get a little confused around v.16-17. The first two verses, v.14-15, are pretty straight-forward. They are also a bit of a repeat from 3:22 where John spoke on prayer. These first two passages are very clear. As believers we can know with complete and total certainty that God hears our every prayer. Once again, I would remind you of the danger of the “*health and wealth*” preachers that have become so popular in my country. They teach of a god that is waiting in heaven to answer every little request we believers might throw up to him. This wrong theology makes the Creator God of the universe into some form of a “*cosmic butler*” waiting on mankind as if we were some type of royalty. This is not God!! John is simply pointing out that God hears every prayer and petition we have. When we are rightly aligned with God, our prayers are more apt to be in line with God’s will for our lives. When this is the case, we see the answers to these prayers manifest.

John is encouraging prayer by telling the believers that God is faithful to hear every request we place before Him. Then, as John moves into v16-17, the passage gets a little more difficult to interpret. **First of all, “who” is John focusing on here and what is that person doing??**

Notice he begins v.16 by referencing “*his brother committing a sin*”. Believers are not perfect. We know that we continue to sin and make mistakes because even though God has changed us, we still have the sin nature that we were born with. This will not change until after we are resurrected in the eternity to come. Yet we know that we do not live lives that are slaves to habitual sin.

Then we come to the confusing part where the Apostle speaks of “*sins leading to death*” and “*sins not leading to death*”. As you might expect, much has been written regarding what the Apostle meant here by these designations. In the end, most all of these explanations revolve around “*sins leading to death*” referring to passages like Matthew 12:32 and Mark 3:29. At their heart the message is that John is referring to people who have a complete and total, ongoing verbal and mentally informed rejection of Jesus Christ as the Savior!!⁷ As sad as it seems, John is sending the message that this person is beyond prayer. The message here is similar to what Jesus taught in the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 7:6.

The natural question that should come to our mind here is this: **Given what John has just said; can saved believers in Jesus Christ fall away into the “*sin that leads to death*” and thus lose their salvation??**

In short, NO! There is absolutely nothing in John’s letter that would lead us to this conclusion. Furthermore, there is actually direct evidence in the letter that refutes this. Let’s re-read 1 John 2:19-20 together:

¹⁹ They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us. But they went out, that it might become plain that they all are not of us. ²⁰ But you have been anointed by the Holy One, and you all have knowledge.

v.18-20:

We are going to move rapidly toward the finish line now. John is making a shift here in these final three verses of the passage. He is staying with the overall theme of confidence or assurance for the believer, but he is moving away from assurance in prayer and moving toward three specific grounds of confidence every believer has. Each verse begins with “*we know*”.

First, in v.18 we see that the Apostle is focusing on the believer’s proper attitude toward sin. He has already taught on this, but now he closes his letter by again restating that followers of Christ do not live a lifestyle of manifest sin. Additionally, he notes that in this life, Christians have God Himself to stand in protection from sin and Satan!!

Second, in v.19 John assures us that believers are “*of God*”. The construction of the wording denotes possession, ownership. We are not simply “aligned” with God. We are His

property. He bought and paid for us with the very blood of His Son, Jesus!! In contrast, the balance of the world belongs to Satan.

Finally, in v.20 John sums all this up by assuring us that “*we know*” that the Son of God has come and he is Jesus Christ!! We know this with our hearts, as well as with our minds. It is not simply a “head knowledge” or intellectual thing. Neither is it mere “blind faith”. God has given us a great testimony and record of Christ. But we must approach and apply this knowledge in our hearts and place our lives totally in his loving hands in order to have eternal life!! Jesus is the true God, it doesn’t get any clearer than this.

v.21:

John does not conclude his letter with the typical farewell address that we so often see in Paul’s letter, or even a letter we might typically write. Instead he ends it with a stern warning. Recall that the theme of the letter was to warn the people about the heresy of the false teachers that had gone out from their midst. He has focused this entire epistle toward teaching them correctly and refuting the false doctrine of the heretics. There is simply nothing else to say other than to affectionately instruct his dear friends to stay away from these false teachings.

ENDNOTES

¹ Daniel L. Akin. *The New American Commentary: vol. 38 1,2,3 John*. Edited by Richard R. Melick Jr., Paige Patterson, Curtis Vaughan. Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2001. 188.

² Ibid. 191.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid. 192.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid. 196.

⁷ Ibid. 209.