

## Authentic Christianity Part 14

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**Preached On:** Sunday, November 6, 2016

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You know, the message of that song, "let freedom ring," you know, the Bible states that you have a God-given right to freedom. The world wants to put us in bondage. The world wants to put us in shackles, but in Jesus' very first sermon, he said that he came to set the captives free. That's not just the words of a musician or the thoughts of a theologian, that is God himself saying that we have the right to freedom. In just a moment, we're going to be challenged by the word of God to embrace that freedom in light of a world that wants to put us in shackles so I'm going to encourage you to pray with me that if not already today, that we will be prepared to hear the freedom that God promises in a world of bondage.

Let's pray together and then I'll close us.

*Lord, we confess this morning that we have given way too much time and attention to the voices of this world. We've heard the pundits, the opinions, the philosophies and the ideologies of both the great and the small, the near and the far, but in just a few moments we're going to read and hear the only voice that really matters and that's yours. So, God, I pray that any and all communication that comes into conflict with what you say, that you would silence it, that you would remove it from our lives, and that the only one we would hear would be you. It is in the name of Jesus Christ we pray. Amen.*

This morning I want to encourage you to open your Bibles to the book of 1 John 5. As you're turning to 1 John 5, if you're a guest or a visitor with us today, we want to welcome you to a series or a message series through the book of 1 John where we're looking at the idea of authentic Christianity. What does an authentic Christian believe? How do they think? How do they see the world? How do they live in the midst of the world? And today I'm going to be completely frank and transparent with you. Today's message is specifically tailored for those who are believers in Jesus Christ. Now, maybe you're here today, maybe you're a guest, maybe you're here for multiple times but maybe you're not a believer, maybe you're questioning, maybe you're curious, maybe you're kind of interested in this thing known as Christianity and the person Jesus Christ but you haven't yet made that decision, allow me to share with you though the majority of the message today is for those who are already believers, I'm going to address you specifically at the end of the message and today is a wonderful opportunity to see what does the Lord, or what has he established as his standard or expectations for his children.

Beginning in verse 1 of 1 John 5, it says,

1 Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ is born of God: and every one that loveth him that begat loveth him also that is begotten of him. 2 By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God, and keep his commandments. 3 For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments: and his commandments are not grievous. 4 For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world: and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith. 5 Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God?

Now, this passage today deals today with the subject matter of maturing or growing in our faith and the title that I've utilized is, "It's time to grow up," and what I mean by that is every one of us recognizes today at some level or in some respect that as a believer in Jesus Christ, we are probably most likely not where we need to be versus where we actually are. And today the challenge for those of us who are believers, what does it look like to grow in our faith, what does it look like to mature in our faith so that his commandments are not grievous and we can overcome the world as he has overcome the world.

Now the first thing I want to address: what's the reason for maturing in our faith? What's the reason for growing in our faith? It says there in verse 1 that we that believe that Jesus is the Christ, that we are born of God. Now the analogy and Jesus utilized this in John 3 when he shared with Nicodemus that he and we must be born again, the spiritual analogy parallels the physical analogy that as we are born physically there is a natural expectation for us to mature physically and to grow up physically, the Lord has the same expectation for us spiritually. As we are born again, as we become believers in Jesus Christ, we're also to mature and grow in our faith spiritually.

Now, the reason for that is we see the position that we hold. It says that we are born of God. Now earlier in this book of the Bible in chapter 2, it says that in our faith there are those that are young in the faith, those that are adolescents in the faith, those that are mature in the faith. What we see is our position and it's a simple rhetorical question: are you where you should be when it comes to your walk with the Lord and your maturing in your relationship with him?

Now, the Bible speaks to this issue twice very specifically in the New Testament. 1 Corinthians 3 and Hebrews 5, there is a representative sent on behalf of the Lord to his people to address specifically that they are not where they should be spiritually. Now, in Hebrews 5, this individual comes to a group of believers and says that he came desiring or expecting them to be teachers but there was still the necessity for them to be students. In other words, they should have progressed to the point of where they were but unfortunately they have perpetuated their spiritual adolescence.

Then in 1 Corinthians 3, whom we know as the Apostle Paul deals with these believers who he says, "You should be beyond these things and why are you still falling into these

temptations and the carnality of the world. You should be further along than this." So whether it is dealing with the struggles and temptations or taking on the responsibilities that we rightfully should, in both of those passages this illustration is given: you should be consuming meat but you're still drinking milk. In other words, you should be growing in your relationship, you should be maturing in your relationship but unfortunately you have allowed adolescent Christianity to perpetuate itself in your life. Why is this so important? Because we see that we have been called to be the position of meat eaters and not milk drinkers.

But there's also a pedigree. It says we're born of God. Now we live in a world today that is fascinated with genealogy and ancestry. You can spend all kinds of money and be involved in all kinds of websites and programs where you can research your family history. You can look up your ancestors and sometimes it's a blessed experience, "We discovered that we're related to some pretty fabulous people that we had no idea we were related to." And sometimes it's not such a good experience, "We find out that we're related to some people that we wish we hadn't done the research to find out."

But we discovered that there is a spiritual pedigree as well as a physical pedigree and I want to share with you something that occurs in the Meyers' home and this was something that happened years ago. Tracy and I sat down and decided to implement this in our family. Now, we've had one of our young men in our home that has gone through this process. There are two more that are waiting in the wings. At their 13<sup>th</sup> birthday, there is a man/son trip that takes place. That's right, two or three days just dad and son by ourselves where we want to go, eat what we want to eat, and do what we want to do. Now it's a lot of fun and it's exciting but there is also a serious intent and agenda as well, and one of those things that I have addressed in the past and I will address in the future is I share with my children their physical ancestry and their pedigree. I want them to see where they've come from. I want them to see the challenges that were embraced. I want to see the victories that took place so that when the world tries to silence them, when the world tries to communicate to them who the world says they should be, they can stand up and say, "No, this is who I am. This is my ancestry. This is my pedigree. This is the blood that runs through my veins."

Now that's great physically but it's more important spiritually. It says here we are born of God. That means you're a child of the King. That means that the same mentality that was in Christ Jesus should be in us. The same mentality that was in the apostles when they said in Acts 5, "We would rather serve God than man," the same mentality that was in the early church.

You know, a few days ago I was discussing with one of my children about the early martyrs and the discussion was: why is it that those who gave their life for the faith, those that went to the stake, those that went to the guillotine, those that were willing to be literally burned alive, why are the reports that we have that oftentimes they embraced it, they relished it, they even said they looked forward to it? Well, I think one of the reasons is, at least today in the Western world, particularly in the United States of America, we have created such a heaven on earth that heaven doesn't look that good in our minds. And

they looked forward to that day of a new body. They looked forward to a day without pain. They looked forward to all of those promises the word of God gives us.

So when we look at growing in our faith, what's the reason as we realize the position we are in versus the position we are supposed to be and then the pedigree from whom we come from dictates who we should be. And that being said, when we come to verse 2 of this passage, we need a quick reality check. We need to just take a step back and see it for what it is versus maybe what we wish it was. It says, "By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God, and keep his commandments. For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments: and his commandments are not grievous." So three times in two verses it says if you're really serious about this Christianity thing, if you really claim to love Jesus, you'll keep his commandments.

Now, several things of note. The first is this: if we're going to have a reality check of keeping his commandments, we've got to make sure that our priorities are straight. Now, I can deal with all kinds of subject matters and go through all kinds of lists but just for the sake of time, I want to deal with what I call the four most commonly mis-prioritized priorities in a person's life. The first priority in your life as a believer in Jesus Christ, number 1 on the sheet of your life should and always be God. No question. Nobody or no thing else should ever take his place. Matthew 6:33, "Seek first the kingdom of God and all these things will be added unto you." So he has first place. Now, I realize we have students and we have singles that are in the room and we'll talk about that in just a moment but if you are married, your spouse is number 2. Your children are number 3. Do not get those reversed. The Bible states that you love your spouse more than your children. That was a pretty loud amen. I'll tell you what... And fourth is your occupation or your job. So anytime we place our occupation above our family or one family member above the other that's out of kilter, we discover that we are not keeping his commandments.

Now allow me to share with you how this had to be worked out of my life years ago. When Tracy and I married, at least in those early days of our marriage, she was not a real fan of facial hair. It's been almost 21 years and you're thinking, well, somehow she became a fan. Allow me to share with you how this occurred. She didn't like the stubble, she didn't like the prickliness of it, and so early in our marriage I found myself going to a youth camp, in fact, I was going to be gone for 13 days. Now, guys, I know it's not shave November but when you go to camp for 13 days, what do we do? We don't shave, right? We're not going to find anywhere where we're going to shave for 13 days and so I decided just to "let it go" for 13 days. Well, as I was preparing to come home I thought, you know, and I've got this warped sense of humor, I thought, "Well, let's just have some fun with her." I mean, I just want to walk in the door and see her reaction when she sees what's on my face. So I walk in the back door and, you know, that warped sense of humor, I was like, "Ta-da!" And she looked at me and she said, "I like it." I said, "Excuse me?" She said, "I like it. Don't get rid of it. I like it." I said, "Honey, do you not understand tomorrow morning I'm going to get up and preach in a Baptist church where they've never had anybody with a beard?" She said, "But I like it."

Now remember priorities, who comes first? God. 2 Samuel, there is a story where King David sends a group of the Israelites to make peace with the Philistines. It's kind of an ambassador situation and they go to make peace and the Philistines are horrific to them and the Philistines do something really interesting: they send them back with their clothes cut in half so they're exposed and they shave half their beard. Do you know what King David says to them? "Grow the beard back and then come to town." Isn't that interesting that King David said, "When you get back to town I want to make sure you've got a good looking beard."

So I'm like, "Okay, God doesn't say anything against this. Tracy likes it. Well, here we go. Time to put priorities to the test." I walk in the church on Sunday morning, I was the proverbial elephant in the room. Everybody was talking about it. Everybody was whispering about it. I began to make my way through the hallways and I stumbled on a men's class and the teacher of that men's class happened to be a professional photographer and I walked in his classroom and he kind of took a double-take and he said, "Jeff, you do understand that everything I see in life, I see through the lens of a camera. So it doesn't mean it's actually true but it's just how I perceive it as if the camera would see it." I said, "Sir, what are you getting at?" He said, "I know it's not real but that facial hair makes you look taller." Hm, now we're talking. So that morning I stood in front of that church and I said, "Friends, we need to have a conversation." I said, "The first thing you need to understand is Tracy loves it." I said, "The second thing you need to understand," and I called the name of the photographer, "he thinks it makes me look taller. You're going to have to strap me down to shave this stuff off. That's all I've got to say."

Now, the reason I share that story is how easy is it to get our priorities mixed up? How easy is it to put our occupation above our spouse or our children above our spouse or something above the Lord. But the reality check when it says "keep his commandments," he has an order of priorities that we must come in line with and we discover, it says here, "they're not grievous." They're actually for our protection. Now it's at this point where there can become an internal conflict, "But I don't like what they say. I'm not a real fan. I'm not feeling it. Or that's not how I identify." I've got news for you: God doesn't care how you feel. He only cares how you obey.

And you go all the way back to the book of Exodus, the original Ten Commandments, chapter 20, you know the passage. Moses comes down from Sinai. There are the two tablets, the Ten Commandments, but beginning in chapter 21 for three chapters, he begins to expound and there's almost a sermon of sorts of why the Ten Commandments are so important and as you read those three chapters of Scriptures it's really different. The Lord says, "If you allow this sin in the camp, I will kill you." He says, "If you let this happen, I will kill that person." And every third or fourth verse he says, "I will eliminate. I will kill. I will eradicate." It's very gruesome. So you get to the last verse of chapter 23 and the Lord says, "The reason I'm doing this is so that sin will not overtake the land." You see, when we see the commandments of God and it shares with us what a family is supposed to look like, what our priorities are supposed to look like, what our beliefs are supposed to line up with, it may go counter the culture but it is actually our protection to do as he

has commanded because when we give the devil an inch, he takes an entire football field. So the reality check is in light of his commandments our priorities need to be line and we need to see that his commandments are not grievous, they're actually for our protection.

So what's the rationalization here? We talked about the reason for this. We talked about the reason for growing up. We talked about the reality check of his word being very clear. Well, what's the rationalization here? When you get to verse 4 and 5, it says, "For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world: and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith. Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God?" The rationalization is that we see that God has made incredible provision for us. Notice what he says: if we believe on the name of the Son of God, we have that position, we have that pedigree, if we realize that we're to have our priorities straight and that he's actually protecting us with his commandments, what does it say he'll provide? Victory. He provides victory.

Now, I know naturally I'm a sports fan and in our home we watch and we participate in a lot of sports. Well, one of the things that I enjoy when it comes to athletic competition at least watching athletic competition, and there are websites and apps and things that will do this, some of you are obsessed with this when they give you the percentage or the chances that one team will win versus the other and it's interesting, you can watch it throughout the whole game because you can discover and I can discover that a team can have a 90 something percent chance of winning but one bad call or one hurt player and all of a sudden the whole game changes. So when you're watching baseball like the other night, in fact, I justify it, now this is probably horrible parenting but it's good grandparenting. I'll share with that in just a moment. It was a lesson in history. I thought it was absolutely important and necessary that my children watch the Cubs win the World Series the other night and we stayed up until midnight watching it. You say, "What does that have to do with a grandparent?" Because one day when I am a grandparent, I want them to tell my grandkids, "Hey, your granddad is so cool. He let us stay up and watch the Cubs win the World Series."

So that's an important event in our life but even during the World Series, that percentage would go back and forth depending on the inning and in college football depending on the player or a fumble or an injured player, almost every game that my boys and I, our family watches, there is a conversation that goes a little something like this, "Hey, dad, who do you think's gonna win? Do you think this team or that team?" And they will tell you I have a stock standard answer to every time we have that conversation and here's what it says, "That's why they play the game." Because we don't know, do we? There can be a 95% chance one team will win and the other will do so. One key injury, one "blown call" and all of our percentages are off kilter.

But what does it say here? We have victory. In other words, that's why Romans 8:28 says that "all things," not some things, most things, "all things work together for good to those who love God and are," what? "Called according to his purpose." It may not look good, it may not feel good, it may not be appealing in the flesh, but we know that he has brought

victory. That is the provision that we can rationalize here that in all of our growth and our maturing, the ultimate aspect is that he wants victory in our life, not defeat.

But he also gives us some rationalization with promises. Notice what it says three times in two verses that we should overcome. Now the book of Revelation and I know most of the book of Revelation is known for what we call its eschatological approach, the end times events, the troubles, the tribulations, characters such as the antichrist, the beast and others, but you know, in the book of Revelation 2 and 3 there is a section of it that kind of just pulls itself, it's a message to the churches. It begins to the church at Ephesus. It ends with the church at Laodicea. Seven churches, seven messages but a common ending. In every one of those seven churches, the Lord ends with saying, "To he that overcomes." To he that overcomes. What does it say here? "Who is he that overcomes but he that believes in the name of the Son of God." What did it say last chapter? "Greater is he that is in us than is in the world."

And so the Lord has given us some incredible promises. In fact, I want to encourage you, turn over to Revelation 2 real briefly as we draw to a close. I just want to share with you some of these statements that the Lord gives us. Beginning in chapter 2, verse 7, the church at Ephesus it says, "He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life." That which humanity forsook in the garden of Eden, that which we no longer have access to. He says everlasting life is now a promise to those who believe.

Now fast forward to verse 11 of chapter 2, the last statement, "He that overcometh will not be hurt of the second death." Revelation 20 talks about that great final judgment where the dead both small and great are brought before the Lord and they are judged according to their works and it says there they are sent to what the Bible calls the lake of fire which is the second death. You know, it's been famously said by others that if we're born once, we'll die twice, but if we're born twice, we only die once. It says we will not be hurt of the second death.

You fast forward to verse 17, "him that overcomes will I give to eat of the hidden manna, and will give him a white stone, and a new name." In biblical days when there was a judicial process, a dark or a black stone was a communication of condemnation, and a white stone was one of freedom and being absolved. It says, "I not only will let you have everlasting life, not only do you never have to go to a place the Bible calls hell, you are exonerated. You are forgiven and I'll even give you a new name." Now think about that. Simon became Peter. Saul become Paul. Jeff becomes I don't know because it says only the Lord knows. You've been given a new name, a new identity, a new beginning.

We get to verse 26 of chapter 2. This is one that's different than all the rest. "he that overcomes, and keeps my works unto the end, to him will I give power over the nations: And he shall rule them with a rod of iron; as the vessels of a potter shall they be broken to shivers: even as I received of my Father." What it says is now that you are saved, now that you are a child of God, now that you find yourself in that position and in that pedigree, it says if you live out your faith, if you grow in your faith, if you mature in your

faith, I will allow you to rule with me. Now the Bible is clear there is coming a day where Jesus is coming back. He will reign and he will rule. He even told us a parable called the parable of the talents and you know the story, that there is one who was given a certain amount of talents and others various amounts, they did so with what they had and they multiplied them, except the one who only had one. The Bible says that he hid it in the dirt. He was fearful of what the Lord might do to him upon his return. But in that parable, you remember, those that traded and those that created or allowed more talents to be formed, he gave more. The one who hid it in the dirt he condemned. He said, "The least you could have done is given it to the bankers and gotten some interest." And at the end of that parable, he makes this analogy, he says, "And such shall you rule and reign over the cities in the kingdom to come." The picture that we get here is that we have the promise of God not only of everlasting life, not only of not having to go to a place the Bible calls hell, not only of being forgiven of our sins in a new beginning, but according to this verse, if we grow in our faith and we mature in our faith, we one day will be rewarded for our faith.

So what we see is that for every one of us no matter where we find ourselves in position, it's time to grow up. We have been called to the dinner table of filet mignon yet how many times do we settle for milk?

Let's pray with our heads bowed and our eyes closed. You know, I mentioned at the beginning of the message those of you who are not believers, those of you that are questioning, those of you that are doubting, those of you that are curious about Jesus and Christianity and maybe here today because of a friendship, maybe you're here because you're curious, I've got incredible news for you. You've realized today that you do not have to experience that second death. You can have what the Bible calls eternal life. You can be forgiven of your sins. Here's the best part about it: you don't have to jump through a bunch of hoops, you don't have to check a bunch of boxes, you don't have to attend a bunch of classes, you have to do what this passage says today, you have to believe on the name of the Son of God.

Maybe that's who you are this morning. Let me encourage you to have a conversation with God. You don't have to say anything out loud, you don't even have to say the same words or phrases that I would say, but if you're here this morning and you're ready to believe, you're ready to confess Jesus as Savior and Lord, maybe this is what that conversation would sound like just between you and God. You say, "God, today I want to share with you that which you already know about me, I'm the problem. I'm the one who has messed up. I'm the one who has sinned. I understand today that my sin is the problem, my rebellion is the problem. I've done things I should have never done. I've said things I should have never said. And I've thought things I should have never thought and I realize the consequences of that. So today I'm coming to declare that I believe that Jesus Christ is the only answer for my sin problem. I believe he lived for me. I believe he went to the cross for me. I believe he rose from the dead so I could be forgiven and I could be saved. God, this morning I realize I don't have all the answers to all the problems of life but I do realize that Jesus is the only answer to my sin problem so I'm asking you to



forgive me, I'm asking you to save me. In the best way I know how, I just want to turn my life over to you."

With our heads still bowed, our eyes still closed, if that's the prayer you prayed this morning or maybe you still have questions and you want to talk with somebody, we'd love the opportunity to facilitate that. In just a moment I'm going to pray over us, after I say amen, we're going to stand up and you can step out and step forward. We'd love the privilege of speaking with you. Or maybe today you're already a believer, maybe you're already what the Bible calls us in Acts 11, you're already a Christian, but maybe today you realize that you haven't grown as you've needed to grow, you're not as mature as you need to be and that's what your desire is, maybe the Lord spoke to you today. You've been a believer but you've never followed in believers' baptism. Let me encourage you to step out in just a moment and take that next step of faith. Or maybe you're a believer, maybe you've been baptized but you realize today you need to be a part of this incredible church to grow spiritually. Let me encourage you to do so today. Or maybe your decision is what you know and nobody else does. You know the weight that hinders you. You know the sin that so easily besets you and you know today it's time to grow up. It's time to get past where you've been and become who you were called to be.

*Lord, as we come to this time of invitation, how good it is to know that you haven't given up on us. Lord, I know there is somebody here today who is thanking you for a second chance, someone who is thanking you for a third chance or maybe there's possibly somebody that said, "God, I've run out of how many times you've given me a chance," and so, God, we thank you today for your grace and for your mercy. We don't deserve it but you're willing to bestow it. And so, Lord, I pray that as enter this time of invitation, whatever it is that you've impressed upon our hearts, it would come out naturally in the response of our feet. It is in the name of Jesus Christ we pray. Amen.*

I'm going to ask you to stand with me as our team leads us. Whatever decision, we'll be here at the front.