

THE DYNAMICS OF OVERCOMING FAITH (I JOHN 5:9-10)

We have considered indirectly a number of different aspects of the Christian experience that John uses to give the Christians some *assurance* of saving faith: love for God and the brethren (2:9), the absence of love for the world (2:15), the inability to habitually and unconscionably commit sin (3:9), etc. In these two verses (5:9-10) John presses home the *operation* of faith in the life of the individual. But we need to step back a little and see the context of the passage and the function of faith. It is not justifying faith, nor is it specifically sanctifying faith. John is dealing here with overcoming faith.

We noticed in our study of V's. 4-5 what John means by overcoming the world in the context of Vs. 3 when the commandments of God become grievous to the Christian. We saw then that worldliness is "*whatever system or way of life, whatever society or companionship of men, tends to make us feel God's commandments to be grievous.*" If victory over the world in the Christian life is accomplished by faith in Christ, then we need to be sure that He actually has accomplished victory *for* us, and that he has the power to accomplish victory *in* us (see previous study). It is proof of this that John produces in the intervening verses (V's. 6-8). John identifies the threefold witness to the historical accomplishments of Christ, the God-man; His baptism (water), His crucifixion (blood) and the Spirit's accompaniment throughout His life. It is this witness that John refers in V's. 9-10.

V's. 9-10 take this testimony to a different level and press it home to the believer's faith. The word testimony (μαρτυρία) is the key word in these verses. It appears six times, with various English translations; *witness* (Vs. 9 X3), *testified* (Vs. 9b), *record, gave* (Vs. 10b). The witness or testimony then, spoken of in V's. 9-10, is the redeeming work of Christ, and how it becomes effective in our lives by faith is the subject of this present study.

1. The Testimony of Man: the declaration of the faith.

John makes the statement "*ye receive the witness of men.*" This could be taken as a non-specific, generally accepted, truth. But it seems to me to have context; the testimony of men concerning the truth, the objective "*faith once delivered to the saints.*" Christ said in John 5:32 "*There is another that beareth witness of me; and I know that the witness which he witnesseth of me is true.*" The counsel and consensus of the

preachers of the Word bear witness to the truth of God in directing and guiding the life of the Christian.

2. The Testimony of God – The Word of faith

But, says John, the witness of men is not sufficient, there is a great witness and it is infinitely greater *“Because this is the witness of God”* This is the emphasis of the verse. Regardless of the witness of men, this is what God says. This is the objective truth of God, although there is a subjective element to it in that God has caused us to believe, it is personally *“our faith”* (Vs. 4).

3. The Testimony of Self: The Dynamics of Faith

John goes further; he says that the man who believes in the Son of God has the witness *“in himself.”* This is the dynamic of a living and vibrant faith and it is found in our relationship with Jesus Christ. The object of saving faith is Christ (Acts 16:31), the object of sanctifying faith is Christ (Romans 8:9-11) and the object of overcoming faith is also Christ. The focus then is not our faith but the object of that faith. Overcoming faith is not merely a creedal statement, it is a living and moving reality. It is here, in the experience of God that faith comes to itself. It is not enough to recite a creedal statement and hope that the mere reciting of it will somehow bolster us up. John makes the point here that true faith is a matter of experiencing the creed, the witness is in us, the interaction of the Christ with the Word and the Spirit of the Word. John’s emphasis could be illustrated here by the scenario of some one who recommends another person to you for some work. You accept the individual’s recommendation, but you find yourself after recommending that individual yourself to others. You had the witness of another, but realise after that you have the witness in yourself. This is what John is saying, believe the Word of the Lord and you will have the witness in yourself; this is the dynamic of faith. Harmony of word and *“If any man will....he shall know...”* John 7:17.

I once heard a young reformed student refusing to sing the lines of the hymn *“you ask me how I know he lives, he lives within my heart.”* I know He lives, his reply was, because the Bible says he lives and that is good enough for me. Such a smug intellectualism has no place in biblical worship. John says here that *“he hath the witness in himself.”*