

*In 1952, Dr. Virginia Apgar devised a simple test given by medical staff to quickly evaluate a newborn's general condition after delivery and to determine if there was a need for extra medical attention or some sort of emergency intervention.*

*This test, called the Apgar Test, is the very first evaluation given to a newborn in the first moments of life – it's given within a minute after delivery, and it assesses things like muscle tone, reflexes, and appearance, and it also measures vital signs such as the heart rate and the breathing rate. In each category, a score of 0 to 2 are given, with a possible combined score of 10 – the higher the score, the better the newborn child.*

In a roundabout way, in the next portion of this letter from the Apostle John, we are going to be presented with a spiritual version of the Apgar Test to evaluate our own general condition as born-again children of God.

We have come to the last chapter in this letter, and throughout this letter, John has been describing how to determine true believers. If you recall, the Gnostics – these false teachers who claimed to be Christians, had crept in and had done a good job of confusing the church, so John went back to the basics and described tests for discerning true believers. He talked about *truth* – believing the right doctrine, he talked about *obedience* to God, and he talked about *love*. He talked about *love* a lot, but now like the cords of a rope, he intertwines these tests of *truth* and *obedience* and *love* – twisting them all together, and bringing them back before us.

So, if you have your Bible, turn to **1 John 5**, and we will begin with **verse 1**.

**Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God, and whoever loves the Father loves the child born of Him.**

I want to begin by looking at the first portion of this verse. At first glance, this portion provides us with a very simple and clear statement of what is necessary to be a Christian. **Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God.**

Just so you know, that word “**believes**” means more than just head knowledge – it's more than knowing facts and doctrine about Jesus, and it's more than feelings – it means to “*entrust, to confide in, to lean on, to commit to*” – it involves an act of our will to trust Him – and in this context – to trust that He is the Christ, the Messiah, the Anointed One, the sacrificial Lamb that God had sent to take away our sin – the One we must trust with our eternal destiny, for He alone is the *reason* for our salvation.

Now, I'm not done with that word "**believes**" because it leads us something else that we need to consider.

If you noticed, that word "**believes**" in the present tense, meaning it's a continuous action, whereas the words "**is born**" is in the perfect tense – it's a completed action, and from that sentence structure, we could rightly say that *everyone who is believing that Jesus is the Christ has been born of God.*

When seen from that perspective, we see a continual action resulting from a completed action and we come to understand that this continual action – this continual faith is actually the *result* of having been born-again of God.

So, John is telling us that one's continuing faith, one's ongoing faith – a faith that perseveres for a lifetime, gives us evidence of being truly saved. I think the late Adrian Rogers explained it well when he said: "*The assurance of my salvation comes not from the fact that I did trust Christ, but that I am trusting Christ for my salvation.*"

Like Adrian Rogers, John is speaking of a persevering faith, and I want to explore this with you for a moment because this is just too important to rush through.

I am convinced the Bible is very clear that a truly born-again believer is saved and safe and secure in their salvation. Sticking with the Apostle John, in his gospel, he records these words from Jesus Himself in **John 6**, beginning with **verse 37**. Jesus said,

*<sup>37</sup> "All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will certainly not cast out. <sup>38</sup> For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me. <sup>39</sup> This is the will of Him who sent Me, that of all that He has given Me I lose nothing, but raise it up on the last day. <sup>40</sup> For this is the will of My Father, that everyone who beholds the Son and believes in Him will have eternal life, and I Myself will raise him up on the last day."*

The security of one's salvation rests with Jesus, and He has guaranteed that all who have been given to Him – all who truly come to Him will be saved. Yes, we may stumble and fall at times, but no matter what, Jesus will lose none who belong to Him. Now, later in **John 10**, beginning with **verse 27**, Jesus says this,

*<sup>27</sup> “My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me; <sup>28</sup> and I give eternal life to them, and they will never perish; and no one will snatch them out of My hand. <sup>29</sup>My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father’s hand. <sup>30</sup> I and the Father are one.”*

In this passage, Jesus explains that it’s the Shepherd who does the saving – not the sheep. The security of the believer is only found in the faithfulness and the ability of the Shepherd to guard His flock, and Jesus tells us that no one will be snatched away from Him – for He is way too strong. The hands that created the universe are the same hands that hold onto His sheep and He keeps them safe. **That’s a comforting thought, isn’t it?**

Of course, there are many other passages just like this that speak on this issue of our eternal security, so again, I am convinced that a person who is truly born again is secure in their salvation, and on top of that, I am also convinced that a born-again believer will persevere in their faith – it’s a life-long faith – it endures to the end, and its evidence of one’s genuine salvation.

Now, on the flip side, if a person claims to be born-again and yet does not persevere in the faith – meaning they depart from the faith both physically and theologically – then John would say they were never really part of God’s people to begin with – they were never saved.

Let me say it this way: you can’t claim you became a Christian many years ago by saying some “*magic prayer*” – you got your “*fire insurance*” from the “*Big Guy Upstairs*” – you’re in the Christian club, and now you can live your life as if God does not matter. You can’t do that, but I fear a lot of people believe they can do just that – they think they are saved even though no transformation took place in their lives. They do what they want, when they want, and with whom they want, and unfortunately for them, one day, just like we are told in **Matthew 7**, Jesus will sadly say to them, “*I never knew you, depart from Me you who practice lawlessness.*”

**Do you remember what John said when talking about those who claimed to be Christian and yet they walked away from the community of God’s people? In 1 John 2:19**, he said,

*They went out from us, but they were not really of us; for if they had been of us, they would have remained with us; but they went out, so that it would be shown that they all are not of us.*

Like Judas amongst the disciples, they were *with us*, but they were not *of us*, and so they *left us*. Our persevering faith is evidence of being truly born of God. Now, you might say, but Pastor, I know a person who was once believed – I’m sure they were saved, but then they walked away from the Lord never to return.

Well, maybe I can address that from another passage by John. Turn to **John 2** beginning with **verse 23** and listen to what John describes,

*<sup>23</sup>Now when He was in Jerusalem at the Passover, during the feast, many believed in His name, observing His signs which He was doing. <sup>24</sup>But Jesus, on His part, was not entrusting Himself to them, for He knew all men.*

Jesus knows what is in every heart – nothing is hidden from Him – there are no secrets, and He knows that some faith is not the kind of faith that creates fellowship with Him.

Some faith is not saving faith – for if you noticed, these people that John described only believed when they saw the signs, they only believed when they had a spiritual experience, they only believed when something wonderful happened, they only believed when they got something out of it, they only believed when things were going their way – but when the signs stopped, when the experiences ceased, when the healing did not come, when the brook dried up so to speak, when Jesus didn’t meet their expectations – their faith was gone and so were they.

They saw the signs but they chose not to see the truth. They had faith – a temporary faith, but not a saving faith for they focused on what Jesus could do for them instead of who Jesus is. Persevering faith is only built on who Jesus is – He has to be the sole object of our saving faith, and if our focus is only on what He does or does not do – then without a doubt, our faith will waiver.

Now before we get off track, let’s get back to our passage in **1 John 5**. Again, John says in **verse 1**,

**Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God, and whoever loves the Father loves the child born of Him.**

Now, adding in the second portion of this verse, John ties the cords of truth and love together. Everyone who **believes** the truth that Jesus is the Christ is born of God, and everyone who **loves** God should love His children. That seems to be a natural order of things.

If we love our parents, then we should also love our siblings as well. Parents – how difficult and frustrating is it when your kids say they “love you” and then they go and mistreat and beat the snot out of each other? I’m like, “Kids, if you really want to show your love to me, then give me some peace in this house and show some love to each other.” That’s best thing for a parent.

So, for those who are truly born-again, John says they are brought into a loving relationship with God, but not only that, they are also brought into a loving relationship with His children, and then like twisting the cords of a rope, John adds another cord and says this beginning with **verse 2**.

**<sup>2</sup>By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and observe His commandments. <sup>3</sup>For this is the love of God; that we keep His commandments; and His commandments are not burdensome.**

I have heard it said that the best thing a father can do for his children is to love their mother, and in that vein, John might say the best way for a child of God to love their brothers and sisters is to love God, and that love for God is best expressed in His love language.

You know, Christians frequently attempt to turn love for God into some emotional mushy stuff, and there isn’t anything necessarily wrong with the emotional mushy stuff, but with that said, none of us should overlook the fact that it is God who is setting the standard of what love for Him really looks like, and for God, He is telling us that His love language, if you will – is obedience.

To God, love should always lead to obedience – not just the external obedience of going through the motions, but obedience that comes from the heart – a heart that doesn’t find God’s commands **burdensome** because we know that His commands are motivated by His love for us, and in response, our obedience to Him is motivated by our love for Him.

Think about it this way. When you really love someone, it’s not as burdensome to do those things which may seem very burdensome to others, and if that idea seems too difficult to understand – then after the service, I think almost any mom can explain it to you better than me.

As born-again believers, we will want to obey the commands from God because we know that He loves us, but not only that, we know His commands are given to

us for guidance and for protection, given to us for our benefit and the benefit of others so that we do not suffer the consequences of disobedience.

*Sara Orne Jewett, one of America's early writers, wrote "The Country of the Pointed Firs" – a novel about life in Maine. She described a woman walking up a path to the home of a retired sea captain named Elijah Tilley. On the way, the lady passed a number of wooden stakes, seemingly at random, driven into the ground. They were painted the same colors as the old sea captain's house.*

*The woman asked the captain about the colored stakes. He said the first time they plowed the ground, they hit a number of large rocks just under the surface. He put the stakes in the ground beside each of the large rocks so he wouldn't hit them in the future.*

In a way, that is what God has done with His commands in the Bible. They are stakes driven in the ground to show us where the danger is. Like the hidden rocks, we may not see the danger of disobedience, but when we heed the stakes, we avoid trouble.

God's love for us is what motivated Him to drive the stakes into the ground. So, if we love God – if we want to please Him and show our gratitude to Him – we keep His commands – commands which are no longer burdensome. It only makes sense. It is for our benefit and for the benefit of others, and it pleases God when we obey Him.

So, there you have the intertwining of three cords in this rope – the cord of truth, the cord of obedience, and the cord of love. For John, these are the tests of a true born-again believer. Now we come to **verses 4 and 5** which gives us the outcome that follows.

**<sup>4</sup>For whatever is born of God overcomes the world; and this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith. <sup>5</sup>Who is the one who overcomes the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?**

In this passage, John brings us back full circle to **verse 1** – both of which speak of our faith in Jesus, and here John tells us that our faith in Jesus is our **victory** and therefore we have **overcome**, and let me explain.

That word "**overcome**" means *to conquer*, it means *to win*, it means *to gain victory* – repeatedly, it's evidence of God's presence and work in our lives, and the key to

this ongoing victory is not how strong our faith is. It's not so much about the strength of our faith, but rather the object of our faith – Jesus.

You see, we don't put faith in faith – we might call that “*positive thinking*” – instead, our faith is in Jesus. He must be the object of our persevering, life-long faith. **Jesus is the Son of God** – the divine Person from heaven who entered humanity in the flesh to relate to us and ultimately, to save us. Our faith is in Him – He is the overcomer who we abide in, and when we believe that Jesus is who He says He is, when we believe that we are who He says we are – children of God, and when we believe that our eternal destiny is what He says it will be – then committing our lives to Jesus – the object of our faith, is the only reasonable course of action.

**And what happens when we commit our lives to Him?** John tells us that we overcome the **world** – in fact, three times he says we overcome the world. **What does he mean by the world?**

Well, if you recall, we talked about the world back in **Chapter 2**, and we learned that word “**world**” refers to an organized system of values and viewpoints and attitudes that are hostile towards God. At its core, it's a spiritual system – deceptively dominated by Satan to influence our physical realm. It's a system that has no room for God, it rejects the truth found in His word, it relishes what God calls sin, it's human-centered, it's self-gratifying, it's corrupted, and it has no regard for God's people. That's the **world** John is speaking of – it's the world that we live in, and it's the world that pulls on us with lusts of the flesh, lusts of the eyes, and the boastful pride of life.

The pull of this world is strong, we can't deny that, and if we are honest, none of us will be completely untainted by this world's influences and values. At times, we will all fall victim to its enticements. We will lose some skirmishes and some battles along the way, but John says the great war has already been won. The victory is ours, that is a settled fact – in Jesus we have overcome, and in the meantime, He consistently and progressively draws us out of this world, to the point that it loses its luster to us, it no longer overwhelms us, it's no longer the object of our attraction and affection – Jesus is.

**How do we overcome the pull of this world today?** Well, John says it's by faith – faith in Jesus, and not a temporary faith you once had many, many years ago, but by a saving faith – a persevering faith in Him right now as revealed in the cord of truth, the cord of obedience, and the cord of love.

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