

If you recall last week we examined vv4-5 under three questions—[1] Who are overcomes—here we learned that every person born of the Spirit has overcome the world—thus all Christians are without exception overcomers and more than conquerors, [2] What do they overcome—John tells us plainly, they overcome the world—that is they overcome the ruler of this world, the attraction of this world, and the thinking of the world, and then [3] How do they overcome, v4b—“and this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith...”—that is they overcome the world by personal heartfelt faith in Christ—and if you remember I suggested that faith enables us to overcome the world in at least three ways—[a] it gives us Christ, [b] it sets the soul working, [3] it brings invisible truths near...

Thus faith is in and of itself nothing, but enables us to overcome only as it lays a hold of Christ, 1Cor.15:57—“but thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ...” Rom.8:37—“we are more than conquerors through Him who loves us...”—our victory is in and because of Christ, and so our faith is the victory as it lays hold of Christ...

Now due to the fact that we ran out of time last week, I was unable to refer to our Savior’s statement that John likely had in mind, Jn.16:33—“In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world...”—these are the final words uttered to His disciples before He was arrested and then crucified—while the world will remain a fierce foe, you will overcome it, and the reason is because I have overcome it on your behalf...

In coming to vv6-13 we come to some of the most difficult and debated verses within this entire letter and in many ways the entire Bible—there are fundamentally two things which render these verses difficult to understand—[1] the phrase in v6—“he who came by water and blood...” is variously interpreted and difficult to understand, and [2] there is a textual variant within the Greek text, so that the NIV, NAS, and ESV [translations I know some of you are using], have omitted what is v7 in the Old and New King James...

Thus those of us who have an Old or New King James have a longer v6—but every other translation has made the latter part of v6 into v7—now in an attempt to simplify things I’m going to preach through the passage as it is found in the NKJ—the largest difference will be next week when we come back to v7 [which has been omitted from the newer translations]...

- I. The Historical Testimony of Jesus Christ—v6a
- II. The Personal Testimony of the Holy Spirit—v6b
- III. The United Testimony of Three Witnesses—v8

I. The Historical Testimony of Jesus Christ—v6a

1. I think it’s essential to notice that the primary purpose behind v6 and following is to verify the historical facts about Christ and His work...
2. Having identified Jesus the Son of God as the object of our faith (v5), the apostle now provides testimony in verification of Christ’s identity...
3. Howard Marshall—“To the modern reader this is a statement which obscures rather than clarifies the thought. Nevertheless, it was obviously meant to draw the readers’ attention to facts which would act as convincing testimony...”
4. Within vv6-9 we have various witnesses who testify to this claim, v8—“and there are three that bear witness on earth: the Spirit, the water, and the blood; and these three agree as one...”
5. Now without doubt the largest difficulty facing us this morning is determining what John means by “water” and “blood...”
6. In what way can it be said that Jesus Christ came by water and blood—“not only by water, but water and blood...”
7. Well let me state at the outset that I believe these terms refer to the baptism and death of Jesus Christ —“water” His baptism and “blood” His death...

8. In these two acts God bore witness to the eternal sonship of Christ—these two were the bookends of our Savior’s earthly ministry...
9. He came by water [that is His formal ministry began at His baptism], and He came by blood [it was completed at His death]...
10. Thus from the beginning to the end—the Father plainly and openly bore witness of the fact that Jesus was the Son of God...
11. The phrase “He came” refers to His literal incarnation, to Him coming to earth—the eternal Son of God came to earth...
12. He came by water and blood—that is, these two acts [His baptism and His death]—testify to both who He is and what He did...
13. Now this interpretation is strengthened if we keep in mind the historical backdrop of John’s letter—if you recall there were various false teachers who denied the literal humanity and full divinity of Christ...
14. It seems they crafted an erroneous doctrine that Jesus of Nazareth received in his baptism a temporary divine endowment that left him at the beginning of His crucifixion...
15. Thus John focuses upon these two events as they played a pivotal place within the system of these false teachers...
16. Martyn Lloyd-Jones summarizes this error—“Jesus of Nazareth was a man, but when He was baptized by John in the Jordan, the eternal Christ came upon Him and entered into Him, so that from the moment of the baptism the eternal Christ was dwelling in the human Jesus. And He continued to do so until just before the crucifixion took place. Then the eternal Christ went back to heaven, and it was only the man Jesus who was crucified...”
17. In short they claimed that Jesus of Nazareth became the Christ or Son of God at His baptism and ceased to be so at the crucifixion...
18. Thus if you notice closely the middle part of v6, you will see that John is anxious to emphasize the blood, v6b—“not only by water, but by water and blood...”
19. In other words—he was combating against the error that denied Jesus lived and died as the Christ—the God-Man...
20. F.F. Bruce—“the one who died on the cross was as truly the Christ, the Son of God, as the One who was baptized in Jordan...”
21. Now at this point I want to briefly show you that both at Christ’s baptism [water] and death [blood] testimony was made to His eternal Sonship...
22. Notice [1] the water, Matt.3:13-17—“then Jesus came from Galilee to John at the Jordan to be baptized by him. 14 And John *tried* to prevent Him, saying, I need to be baptized by You, and are You coming to me? 15 But Jesus answered and said to him, Permit *it to be so* now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness. Then he allowed Him. 16 When He had been baptized, Jesus came up immediately from the water; and behold, the heavens were opened to Him, and He saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting upon Him. 17 And suddenly a voice *came* from heaven, saying, This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased...”
23. Now I trust that the importance of this event is apparent, notice a few things—[a] it’s the beginning of our Savior’s formal ministry...
24. Up to his point He had lived in relative quietness—but now, probably at the age of 30 years, in keeping with the OT law concerning priests, our Savior makes His public appearance...
25. Now this of course is not to deny that He was just as much the Son of God during the first 30 years of His life then He was at His baptism...
26. But isn’t it interesting to notice, that the NT is virtually silent upon these years, and in fact the first thing John records in His gospel is His baptism...
27. Joel Beeke—“Jesus entered his office as Messiah by water; he was baptized by John the Baptist ‘to fulfill all righteousness.’ When Jesus was baptized, he was fulfilling Num.8:6-7...”
28. Num.8:6-7—“Take the Levites from among the children of Israel and cleanse them. 7 Thus you shall do to them to cleanse them: Sprinkle water of purification on them, and let them shave all their body, and let them wash their clothes, and *so* make themselves clean...”

29. Notice [b] it [His baptism] was testified to by the Father and Spirit—the Spirit descends upon Him (v16), v17—“and suddenly a voice came from heaven, saying, This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased...”
30. The Spirit’s descent upon Him was symbolic of His being formally anointed for His work—this was typified in the OT by oil which was symbolic of the Holy Spirit...
31. It was at His baptism that Christ’s ministry formally began—here He was officially set aside especially as the priest of His people...
32. Notice [c] the purpose behind His baptism was to fulfill all righteousness, v15—“but Jesus answered and said to him, Permit it to be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness...”
33. By which I understand to mean—Christ came to perfectly fulfill the righteous expectations of God on behalf of His covenant people...
34. He came to fulfill all of the ceremonial types, but also the ever binding expectations of the moral law of God, Rom.10:4—“for Christ is the end [or goal] of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes...”
35. Thus I suggest to you that baptism was always associated with moral purity, a fact that is true of our baptism as well...
36. What is one fundamental purpose behind believers’ baptism but that we are testifying we have been cleansed from our moral filth...
37. Although our Savior had no filth from which He needed cleansing, He was here openly identifying with His people as the one who would fulfill all righteousness on their behalf...
38. Thus water became associated with His moral purity, while blood [as we shall see] became associated with His atoning death...
39. It’s for this reason that immediately after His baptism, in 4:1, our Savior is tempted by the Devil, as He overcomes the world as the sinless and perfect last Adam...
40. Thus the Father and the Spirit testified that He was the Son of God—this was the Christ—the one who came by water and is worthy of our wholehearted trust...
41. Notice [2] the blood, Matt.27:50-54—“And Jesus cried out again with a loud voice, and yielded up His spirit. 51 Then, behold, the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom; and the earth quaked, and the rocks were split, 52 and the graves were opened; and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised; 53 and coming out of the graves after His resurrection, they went into the holy city and appeared to many. 54 So when the centurion and those with him, who were guarding Jesus, saw the earthquake and the things that had happened, they feared greatly, saying, Truly this was the Son of God!...”
42. Here we find the historical and literally death of Christ—a death assented to with various miracles as well as verbal testimony—similar to His baptism...
43. Notice [a] signs and wonders—these were three, the veil within the temple was torn, the earth quaked splitting the rocks, and graves were opened...
44. Notice [b] verbal testimony, v54—“so when the centurion and those with him, who were guarding Jesus, saw the earthquake and the things that had happened, they feared greatly, saying, Truly this was the Son of God...”
45. There remains one thing that needs to be said—I believe that the imagery of water and blood are also in fulfillment to the OT ceremonial washings and sacrifices...
46. If you recall the high priest on the Day of Atonement, had to first wash his body with water, and then enter beyond the veil with blood—water and blood...
47. Lev.16:4—“he [Aaron] shall wash his body in water...[v14] and he shall take the blood of the bull and sprinkle it with his finger on the mercy seat...”
48. This was the divine order with reference to the high priestly work—water and blood—moral purification and blood atonement...
49. Thus Christ as the High Priest of the new covenant came by water and blood—He perfectly performed His priestly work and He fulfilled the OT ceremonial system...

II. The Personal Testimony of the Holy Spirit—v6b

1. Having established the fact that Christ came by water and blood—that is, His eternal Sonship was born witness to in the beginning and end of His ministry, John now identifies how these events are testified to...
2. V6b—“and it is the Spirit who bears witness, because the Spirit is truth...”—the Spirit is truth, and thus His testimony is trustworthy...
3. How are those who were born 2,000 years after the baptism and death of Christ occurred, have the confidence that these events actually occurred...
4. Well this is precisely what John now addressed—the Spirit is the great Testifier of Christ in general and these events in particular...
5. It may be helpful to notice that the phrase—“it is the Spirit who bears witness...”—refer to a present ongoing activity...
6. Thus I want you to keep in mind that the Spirit’s testimony of Christ is present and ongoing—He is presently bearing witness to the water and the blood...
7. Jn.15:26-27—“but when the Helper comes, whom I shall send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father, He will testify of me. And you also will bear witness, because you have been with me from the beginning...”
8. I think it’s apparent that in writing the latter half of v6 John had these words in mind—notice several things—[a] the Spirit is “the Spirit of truth...”
9. Now back in 1Jn.5:6 John said of Him—“the Spirit is truth...”—that is, He is truth just like “God is light” and “God is love”—“God is truth...”
10. But our Savior says something slightly different by describing Him as—“the Spirit of truth...”—that is, the Spirit who will author truth...
11. Notice [b] He will bear witness of Christ—“He will testify of me...”—in other words, the grand purpose behind the work of the Spirit to bear witness to the person and work of Christ...
12. Here the primary way this is achieved is through the word of truth—the Spirit will author the truth wherein He will testify of Christ...
13. Notice [c] the disciples will also bear witness of Christ—“and you also will bear witness, because you have been with me from the beginning...”
14. Now at this point I want to suggest to you that the Spirit bears witness of Christ [the water and the blood] fundamentally in two ways—[1] His outward testimony in Scripture...
15. If you recall earlier John told us that he too, as an apostle, bears witness to the historical facts of Christ, 4:14—“and we have seen and testify that the Father has sent the Son as Savior of the world...”
16. In other words, he too could bear witness within his apostolic writings—but here he omits himself and speaks of the ultimate author of Scripture and thus testifier of Christ...
17. Lenski—“The ultimate One bearing testimony, from whom all the apostles also derive their testimony, on whom their own faith also rests, is the Holy Spirit, none less...We hear his voice in the Scriptures, notably in the New Testament...”
18. Jn.5:39—“You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of me...”
19. Notice [2] His inward testimony in our hearts—the Holy Spirit bears witness of the word, powerfully and effectually, within the hearts of God’s people...
20. Our confession puts it like this—“our full persuasion and assurance of the infallible truth, and divine authority thereof, is from the inward work of the Holy Spirit bearing witness by and with the Word in our hearts...”
21. This is to say the Spirit bears witness to the water and the blood within our hearts—He convinces us of the divine authority and thus trustworthiness of Holy Scripture...
22. Calvin put it simply—“It is the Holy Spirit who seals in our hearts the testimony of the water and the blood...”

III. The United Testimony of Three Witnesses—v8

1. John here summarizes what he has already said in v6—the Spirit, testifies with the word and blood, as to the person and work of Christ...

2. The Spirit testifies with and by the word, which contains the written record of Christ and His work—the water and the blood...
3. The phrase—“these three agree as one...”—is literally—these three are one—that they agree in their testimony of Christ...
4. Notice [1] the Spirit’s work is inseparable from the word—“and there are three that bear witness on earth: the Spirit, the water, and the blood, and these three agree as one...”
5. Notice [2] the Spirit’s testimony is worthy to be believed—by this I mean that we should wholeheartedly put our trust in Christ as the Son of God...
6. For we find a sure testimony preserved within the pages of Holy Scripture [water and blood], which is born witness to within our hearts by the Spirit...
7. Deut.19:15—“one witness shall not rise against a man concerning any iniquity or any sin that he commits; by the mouth of two or three witnesses the matter shall be established...”