

Module 19: 1 John 5:1-5 (Part 3)

Group Exercise 1

Verse 4 begins with the word “For” (NAS) to explain a truth previously taught by John. What is the previously taught truth and what is John’s explanation for this truth beginning in verse 4?

Group Exercise 2

How does verse 5 fit in with the immediate context of verses 1-3? How does it fit in with the overall theme of John’s letter?

Group Exercise 3

What phrase is stated three times in three successive sentences? Why? What do you see as the progression of thought?

1) Observations and Observational Questions that guide Interpretation

- a) Read 1 John 4:7-5:5 for context.
- b) What words do you see as important, either because they are repeated often or they are part of a key teaching in verses 5:1-5? **Christ, love, commandment, overcome, faith**
- c) What title do you suggest for the paragraph starting in verse 5:1? **Victory Through Christ; The One Born of God Believes, Loves, Obeys, and is Victorious**
- d) Transition – links to previous verses
 - i) Immediate context
 - (1) “Whoever believes . . . is born of God” (1)
 - (a) Is further explained with “whatever is born of God overcomes the world” (4)
 - (b) Is further explained with “who...overcomes, but he who believes?” (5)
 - (2) “His commandments are not burdensome” (3). Why? This is explained in verse 4, beginning with the word “For”.
 - ii) Book context (Stott)
 - (1) First Application of the Tests (2:3-27)
Obedience (2:3-6); Love (2:7-11); Belief (2:18-27)
 - (2) Second Application of the Tests (2:28-4:6)
Obedience (2:28-3:10); Love (3:11-18); Belief (4:1-6)
 - (3) **Third Application of the Tests (4:7-5:5)**
 - (a) Love (4:7-12)
 - (b) Belief and love combined (4:13-21)
 - (c) **Belief, love, and obedience combined (5:1-5)**
- e) “For whatever is born of God overcomes the world” (4a)
 - i) “For”
 - (1) Commandments of God are not burdensome because of their character (implicitly in verse 3; they come from a God – we know He is our Father; He is holy, gracious, and loving.).

- (2) Furthermore (explicitly), believers have been given the possibility of keeping them. That is, “whatever is born of God overcomes the world”.
- ii) “whatever”
- (1) Neuter noun
 - (2) States principle in its most general and abstract form.
 - (3) Emphasis is not ‘the victorious person’, but ‘the victorious power’. “It is not the man, but his birth from God, which conquers.” (Plummer)
- iii) “is born of God”
- (1) Perfect-passive participle, “that which has been born”
 - (2) Power is the abiding result of the new birth
 - (3) The passive turns the attention from the believer himself to the God who wrought the new birth in him. (Hiebert)
- iv) “overcomes”
- (1) *Nikao*: to conquer
 - (2) 28x in NT; 6x in 1 John (2:13, 14; 4:4; 5:4 twice, 5)
 - (3) 3x in three successive sentences is the phrase “overcomes the world”
 - (4) Second of the three is an aorist participle. (See more details below.)
 - (5) Other two occurrences are in the present tense. Presents the victory as the characteristic experience of the believer. (Hiebert)
- v) “the world”
- (1) A word which “gathers up the sum of all the limited, transitory powers opposed to God which make obedience difficult” (Westcott)
 - (2) Sometimes these are moral pressures – the outlook, standards and preoccupations of a godless, secular society, ‘the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life’. (Stott)
 - (3) Sometimes they are intellectual (heresy).
 - (4) Sometimes they are physical (persecution).
 - (5) But, whatever form the world’s assault upon the Church may take, the victory is ours.
- f) “and this is the victory that has overcome the world – our faith.” (4b)
- i) “this”
- (1) Demonstrative pronoun, looks forward to the appositional “our faith”, which is placed emphatically at the end of the sentence.
 - (2) The new birth gives the believer the potential of victory, but the realization of actual victory depends on our active exercise of faith.
- ii) “victory”
- (1) *Nike*: victory
 - (2) A root of the word for “overcome”. (See above.)
 - (3) Noun occurs only here in the NT. Term was common in contemporary Greek.
 - (4) Term does not mean a concrete victory that has been achieved
 - (5) Used figuratively to denote “the means for winning a victory” or “the power that grants victory”. (Hiebert)
 - (6) “Conquering power” (Brown)

(7) “the victory, the one that overcame the world” – use of the articular participle strengthens the assertion of the active nature of this victory. (Hiebert)

iii) “has overcome the world”

The use of the aorist tense seems to denote some specific occasion when this victorious power was effectively displayed.

(1) Christ’s once-for-all victory over Satan (John 12:31-32; 14:30) and the world (John 16:33) through His work on the cross. The believer’s victory is gained by his active appropriation of the victory that has already been won by Christ.

(2) Believer’s victory (our faith). The aorist participle (the second of three “overcomes”) connotes timelessness. “The aorist expresses a fact that is always true.” (Kistemaker). The victory in view may be that gained over the heretics, causing them to withdraw (2:18-19) or over the teaching of the false prophets (4:4).

(3) Reference to the conversion of the individual believer. Lenski renders “and this is the victory, the one that became victorious over the world, our faith”. The pronoun “our” generalizes this experience with the accepted fact that the initial victory continues to be aggressively exercised. The believer’s continuing exercise of victorious faith is portrayed in verse 5. (Hiebert)

(4) I lean toward this last view. For me, the context refers to the faith of the individual believer that had its first conquest at each believer’s conversion. (We believe because we are born of God (1a)).

iv) “our faith”

(1) Initially at conversion

(2) Subsequently with specific examples (2:18-19; 4:4)

“The new birth gives us the potentials of victory, but actual overcoming depends on faith. The new birth implants within us all the necessities for an overcoming life, but faith puts these things to work. It takes birth plus faith. It takes power plus personality. This means that both God and man must work together. God does not do it all for us nor can we do it all for ourselves.” (Laurin)

g) “Who is the one who overcomes the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?” (5)

i) “Who”

(1) John’s question turns the thought from the principle of victory to the victorious individual.

(2) “Who” asks for the personal identification of the one characterized as overcoming the world.

(3) The present tense makes clear that the conflict is not yet over but that the outcome is sure.

(4) John does not leave these words as an independent question (as the NIV translates it) but continues with the suggested answer. Literally, “if not the one believing that Jesus is the Son of God?” If the one so described is not victorious over the world, then no one is.

- ii) “but he who believes”
 - (1) What distinguishes the true victor is the content of his faith: “he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God”.
 - (2) Is there any one who does not believe this who is victorious? No!
- h) The progression of thought
 - i) General Concept: the power is from God via our spiritual birth. (4a)
 - ii) Specific Examples: the initial victory is seen in individual conversions, followed by subsequent victory over false teachers.
 - iii) Specific Content of Faith: belief that Jesus is the Son of God.
- i) Full circle (Stott)
 - i) Christian believers are God’s children, born from above.
 - ii) God’s children are loved by all who love God.
 - iii) Those who love God also keep His commandments.
 - iv) They keep His commandments because they overcome the world,
 - v) They overcome the world because they are Christian believers, born from above.
- j) “Whichever is the best way of seeking to follow John’s closely-knit argument, what is plain is that his three tests belong together and cannot be separated. The true Christian, born from above, believes in the Son of God, loves God and the children of God, and keeps the commandments of God. Each involves the others. Belief, love and obedience are marks of the new birth. The new birth brings us willynilly into a certain relation to Christ, to God, to the Church and to the world which we cannot repudiate and which marks us out as Christians.” (Stott)
- k) What other observations do you see? (Words, grammar, construction, history, content, etc.)

2) Interpretation

The reason His directives do not feel burdensome is that in general whatever is given life by God continually conquers the world system opposed to God which makes obedience difficult. Moreover, the victorious power that has notably conquered the world system is our faith, which began its work individually at our conversion and has triumphed over the recent attacks of false teachers.

Specifically who is the person who continually conquers the world system other than the person who believes that Jesus is the Son of God? No one!

3) Applications

- a) Believers do not always live victoriously. Why do you think this is so?
- b) Three times in this passage it is mentioned that we overcome the world. Referring to the definition of the world (moral, intellectual, physical) in the notes above, list specific ways in which you can live life victoriously according to the truth of verses 4-5. Determine to do one of these starting today.
- c) What other application do you have?