

# The Fruits of the New Birth

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## **Text:**

I John 5: 1-5

Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been born of God, and everyone who loves the Father loves whoever has been born of him.

By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and obey his commandments.

For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments. And his commandments are not burdensome.

For everyone who has been born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world--our faith.

Who is it that overcomes the world except the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?

## **Introduction:**

We are nearing the end of I John and of his second series of conditions for living in fellowship with God. One final condition remains—we must keep the faith.

Today's text concludes what John has to say about love as a condition or evidence of fellowship with God.

The first thing we should notice about this paragraph is that it begins and ends with an expression that is characteristic of the second half of the Epistle: "has been born of God". Between 2:29 and 5:18 we find these words 10 times. This should not be surprising since he is writing about "walking as God's children", and being God's children presupposes that we have been born into God's family. Most of what John has to say in these chapters could be prefaced with: "Since you have been born into God's family and are his children you should be living in this

way”. The way we should be living can be summarized under the five conditions that he develops in these chapters:

- We should be renouncing sin
- We should be obeying the commands of Christ
- We should be renouncing the world
- We should be loving one another
- We should be keeping the faith

I have stated it the way that I have to emphasize a contrast between tenses present in all of the passages that speak of our having been born of God that is especially pronounced in the paragraph we are now studying. “We have been born of God”. This speaks of something that happened in the past that has continuous ongoing consequences. All the other actions referred to in this passage and in the other passages that speak of our spiritual life are continuous ongoing actions. They are not something we do once and then stop, but they are things that we are always doing. There is a succession of them in these five verses which we can paraphrase as follows:

Since we were born of God, that is we received spiritual life from God at a specific moment in the past, and we are now presently alive in Christ, and we are living out that new life by the power of the Holy Spirit, we are presently day by day, moment –

- Believing that Jesus is God’s Messiah, the fulfillment of all his past promises, and therefore, we are trusting him and following him.
- We are loving God the one who gave us new life in Christ, and we are loving his other children, all of our brothers and sisters in Christ.
- We are demonstrating our love for God’s family by joyfully keeping Christ’s commandments
- Since we are joyfully keeping his commandments we are experiencing victory over the world. We are living in God’s shalom instead of the chaos of the world.

- We are able to do this because we are believing that Jesus Christ is God's Son and he is the one who enlightens us and empowers us to live this life of victory.

This is a rather awkward way of stating this, but I want you to see the emphasis on the continuous action in our life that flows from God's gift of eternal life. A shorter way to summarize the passage would be with a series of five words: regeneration (or new birth), faith, love, obedience, victory. When we understand the connection between these words, we will have grasped the central message of this Epistle, but more than that, when we have come to live in the way that John describes, we will be living in fellowship with God and with Christ, and thus experiencing God's peace. With this in mind let's review the chain of events as John presents it.

## **I. God Gives us New Life in Jesus Christ**

As we have already pointed out, twice in these five verses we read "who has been born of God". This is the first link in the chain. Everything else is impossible without it. We cannot live the Christian life if we do not have the life of Christ in us. That life is a gift of God and a work of the Holy Spirit. This is the reason Jesus told Nicodemus: "you must be born again". The Christian life is not something we do, or create. It is simply the living out of the life that is given to us freely in Jesus Christ.

Once that life exists it demonstrates itself. God's children, those who have been born into his family, bear certain unmistakable family traits; they act in a way that is consistent with the life of Christ they have received. This life is summed up in our text in the four other words stated earlier: faith, love, obedience, and victory.

## **II. Those who Possess that Life Demonstrate it by Trusting Jesus**

The first sign of life is faith in Christ. It begins and ends the passage. The first verse states: “Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been born of God”; then the end of the passage states: “For everyone who has been born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world--our faith. Who is it that overcomes the world except the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?”

There are many things we could say about these verses, but the one thing that I want to emphasize is the present tense form of the verb “believe” both in verse 1 and in verse 5. Earlier we paraphrased it “is believing” or “is trusting”. It is not just that we come to believe that Jesus of Nazareth is God’s Messiah, and God’s Son and confess our faith in him. That is of course important and we talked about it earlier and will come back to it in the next part of chapter five. What is emphasized here, however, is that those who have received new life in Christ have confidence in him, and having confidence in him, they reject the false wisdom of the world and follow his way, his teaching. We cannot do that if we do not trust him; if we are not believing in him moment by moment as we live our lives.

Each time we face a situation where we must decide on a plan of action, and the way of Christ is not the normal human way. What will prompt us to do the right thing, the Christ like thing, is our confidence that he is right, and that doing things his way is always best.

### **III. When We Trust Jesus We will Act in Love**

“Everyone who loves the Father loves whoever has been born of him.” Faith in Jesus Christ impels us to love God and to love God’s children. The previous paragraph had closed with these words: “whoever loves God must also love his brother”. We cannot believe in Jesus Christ and not love God, and we cannot love God and not love God’s children. We don’t need to insist on this at this point as John has been making it all along the way. If anyone ever came up with a version of the Christian life that excluded loving one another, they would first need to

exclude this book from the Bible, but that of course would not solve the problem because the same teaching is found in every other book of the New Testament. Nothing is more central to the Christian life. When we trust in Jesus; when we listen to him and follow his orders, we will act out of love.

#### **IV. We Act in Love by Keeping God's Commands**

It is this fourth link in the chain that some may find puzzling. How does keeping God's commands demonstrate that we love God's children? But this is what John sets forth as the proof that we are loving one another. He says: "By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and obey his commandments." Let me suggest a couple of reasons why keeping God's commands is a demonstration of love to other people.

First, most of God's commands have something to do with the way we treat one another. Take something as basic as the Ten Commandments. If I kill my neighbor, or steal from him, or commit adultery with his wife, or tell lies about him, or covet his possessions, I am certainly not loving him. This may be only the beginning of love, but it is love, for the beginning of love is to do no harm. Anything that harms another is not love, so when I keep God's commands, which instruct me to do no harm to others, I am taking the first steps in loving others.

Secondly, God's greatest command is his command to love. When Jesus was asked which commandment was greatest he said: "The most important is, 'Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.' The second is this: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these" (Mark 12:29 – 31). Moreover, as we have mentioned on several occasions during this study, Jesus' new commandment which is sometimes called the great commandment is that we should love one another as he has loved us.

Finally, we need to clearly understand that when we take God's commands seriously; when we avoid doing those things he tells us not to do, and when we do those things he tells us to do, life is better for us and those around us. It makes our homes, and our churches healthy and pleasant places. It creates spaces in which individuals can thrive and become what God wants them to be. This is what John has in mind when he says: "his commands are not burdensome". This is most likely reflecting back to what Jesus said in Matthew 11: 28 – 31: Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."

His commands are not burdensome because they work for our good. The more diligently we listen to them and keep them the better things are for us and everyone around us. Imagine, for example, a home or a church where everyone is a conscientious believer in Jesus; all are making a serious effort to "know and do his words". Then imagine a home, or even a church, where the opposite is true, where the commandments of God are unknown and unheeded. In which will love be the most evident? Where will God's peace reign? In which will people be thriving and content? God's commands are not burdensome because they were meant for our good. When they become burdensome it is because they have been perverted and sidetracked from their intended purpose.

## **V. When We Keep God's Commands We Overcome the World**

The last of our five words is "victory". Everyone who has been born of God, overcomes the world. The whole world, John will say at the end of this chapter, lies in the power of the evil one. It is the place where God's shalom has been shattered, where chaos rules. God is in the process of redeeming it and ultimately it will again be submitted to his authority and Christ will rule it as its rightful king. But for the present, we who are God's children, "are in the world but not of the world", and he that is in us (the Holy Spirit) is greater than he that

is in the world” (I John 4:4). When we trust Christ enough to follow him, when we live by his teachings and keep his commands then love reigns, God’s peace is established, and the chaos of the world is overcome.

We may evaluate where we are in relation to what the passage is saying by thinking about this victory over the world. If I am abiding in Christ, If his love is being perfected in me, If out of love I am keeping his commands then I will know his victory, and that victory will be evidenced by his peace “which passes all understanding” reigning in my life. All of this is beautifully visualized in the hymn “Constantly Abiding”:

There’s a peace in my heart that the world never gave,  
A peace it cannot take away;  
Though the trials of life may surround like a cloud,  
I’ve a peace that has come here to stay!

Constantly abiding, Jesus is mine;  
Constantly abiding, rapture divine;  
He never leaves me lonely, whispers, O so kind:  
“I will never leave thee,” Jesus is mine.