

Sermon: Are You A Winner?

Text: [I John 5:1-5 ESV](#)

Gary L. Wackler

August 21, 2022

Introduction: This remaining chapter in [I John](#) repeats many of the same points about what it takes to have a saving relationship with Jesus. John talks of belief or faith in terms of something we do, not just something or even Someone we know. John insists that love of God and others is also a key, and love does not mean putting up with or overlooking sin, but being willing to serve and sacrifice for others to demonstrate we are really God's children. And finally, John wants us to know we are and can be winners in life, and victorious in how we model Jesus to others.

Let's listen to these opening verses of chapter 5: [I John 5:1-5 ESV Overcoming the World](#)

1 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. 2 By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and obey his commandments. 3 For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments. And his commandments are not burdensome. 4 For everyone who has been born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith. 5 Who is it that overcomes the world except the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?

So let's walk through these verses together. John, the writer of this epistle, speaking to the Church, reminds them that if they truly believe in Jesus as the Christ, the Messiah of God, it will transform the way they relate to others. This personal trust or faith will show up in the way they love those like themselves in the church - other brothers and sisters. Again it is not that we don't love those outside the Church, but we dare not live like them or believe what they affirm. We are all sinners in the church and those outside, but for those who are God's children - born again of the Spirit, we have been forgiven. Those who chose to not believe in Jesus stand condemned.

“Everyone who believes” ([v. 1](#))

Q. Is this talking about just a point back in time when we answered the call to accept Jesus as Savior?

A, No. It is more than that. “Believes” is a present tense verb which speaks of a current reality, i.e. you could read this: “everyone who believes and continues to believe. John talks about belief being accompanied by love. But one must understand “Belief without love is, as Saint Augustine remarks, the belief of a demon.”

[James 2:19 ESV](#) 19 You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe—and shudder! Correct doctrine does not guarantee a real/genuine follower of Christ.

Plummer in his commentary asks what do you think of I John 4:20? **I John 4:20 ESV** ²⁰
If anyone says, “I love God,” and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot[a] love God whom he has not seen.

Footnotes: [a] **1 John 4:20** Some manuscripts *how can he*

“This verse shews that **iv. 20** ought not to be interpreted to mean that through love of the visible brother we ascend to the love of the invisible God. On the contrary the love of the Father is the source of love of His children.”

Someone said this: “It was from Buber’s other writings that I learned what could also be found in *I and Thou*: the central commandment to make the secular sacred.”

- Martin Buber, *I and Thou*

The Bible has it right and just the reverse of man’s perspective. I do not learn to love God through you, but I love you because God loved me first.

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

If we love God, we will love his children because we are all of the same family spiritually. This familial relationship is proven through obedience.

Mark 3:31-35 ESV ³¹ And his mother and his brothers came, and standing outside they sent to him and called him. ³² And a crowd was sitting around him, and they said to him, “Your mother and your brothers are outside, seeking you.” ³³ And he answered them, “Who are my mother and my brothers?” ³⁴ And looking about at those who sat around him, he said, “Here are my mother and my brothers! ³⁵ For whoever does the will of God, he is my brother and sister and mother.”

We dare not just know what is right, we must do it. Obedience is a sign of love.

James 1:22-25 ESV ²² But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. ²³ For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks intently at his natural face in a mirror. ²⁴ For he looks at himself and goes away and at once forgets what he was like. ²⁵ But the one who looks into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and perseveres, being no hearer who forgets but a doer who acts, he will be blessed in his doing.

John goes on to insist our theology /what we believe about God/ must be practical.
3 For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments. And his commandments are not burdensome.

So again love needs to be demonstrated in obedience.

The word translated *burdensome* (βαρύς) can also mean heavy. The KJV reads: **I John 5:3 KJV** 3 For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments: and his commandments are not grievous.

When you truly love God, we enjoy obeying Him and doing what is required by our loving Father. You might remember the O.T. story of Jacob who worked 7 years for Laban to secure the hand of Rachel. The Scripture reads: **Genesis 29:20 ESV** 20 So Jacob served seven years for Rachel, and they seemed to him but a few days because of the love he had for her.

An old proverb says, “Love feels no loads.”

Q. In what ways could God’s commands (requirements) seem grievous, or burdensome?

A. If we tried to obey without love and the aid of the Holy Spirit.

Matthew 11:28-30 ESV 28 “Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. 29 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. 30 For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”

Yoke is a word used by the rabbis for commandments.

4 For everyone who has been born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith. 5 Who is it that overcomes the world except the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?

When John uses the word “world” (kosmos), almost in every case, he means for it to stand for what opposes God’s values and plan. The kosmos follows its prince and does not share God’s mission and purpose of redemption and salvation for this fallen world.

Q. So, how does one overcome or win over the world?

A. Only through “abiding” faith in God and that is made possible through/in Jesus. It is faith in what Jesus did at the cross where he was victorious over sin and death “once for all.”

Hebrews 9:12-14 ESV 12 he entered once for all into the holy places, not by means of the blood of goats and calves but by means of his own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption. 13 For if the blood of goats and bulls, and the sprinkling of defiled persons with the ashes of a heifer, sanctify for the purification of the flesh, 14 how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, purify our conscience from dead works to serve the living God.

The word “victory” (**νίκη**) used here is in noun form and appears nowhere else in the NT. Although, there are verbal forms where we hear the idea of conquest. And after a long list of adversities where there might be a danger to give up, Paul writes to the church:

Romans 8:37 ESV ³⁷ No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.

In other words, whatever the devil or this world may throw at us we will be victorious in and through Christ. And after describing heaven in the last book of the Bible, John writes: **Revelation 21:7 ESV** 7 The one who conquers will have this heritage, and I will be his God and he will be my son.

Winning has become such an important part of our nation’s psyche. You’ve heard the old quote: “winning isn’t everything; it’s the only thing.” Winning is so important to some, they will cheat to win. But cheaters and posers almost always are found out.

Some people are unable to be winners many times because they simply aren’t disciplined and don’t put in the work. Some will try and at least look the part. Illus. Years ago when I was in Deming, NM, and about 40 I started a regimen of walking with Lucille Hays. She was 72 and maybe 4’11” and she could walk as fast as I could without running. When I first got started I wore street clothes - then I got a sweatsuit, ankle weights, and a ball cap. I couldn’t afford Nike’s so I wore my Converse high-tops.

One morning, 2 boys were out playing early on Nickel Street and they said, “Are you the Coach?” And I said, “yes, I am.” One other time, I remember something similar when my college class went up to the Chicago Art Museum, and the museum’s guide took me to be the professor because I was leading the group, well, and my age (about 39). The way a person looks is not always reality.

Are you a winner? I look at the church as a family or even a team. You understand there are only two teams in our world: the saints and the demons. Some people aren’t winners simply because they join the wrong team.

the demon team looks good
the demon team has won a few games
the demon team has a good time it seems
the demon team isn’t required to be disciplined

Some people aren’t winners because they never join the saints’ team. As a result, they will lose ultimately.

These pretenders meet all the requirements. They go through the orientation, but they don't report for practice or training for the game of life. They never put their faith in Jesus and step over into the baptismal pool.

Some people aren't winners because they don't play. They seem to get a thrill by watching other people win. This is what Kyle Idleman has called a fan rather than a follower of Jesus. These people have joined the team in a matter of speaking. They come to all the team meetings. They know everything there is to know about the game and would play much better than the starters, but don't, because afterall someone needs to criticize from the bench or bleachers.

Sometimes the church gets confused in its thinking. Over the last 6 years or so we have had a number of our members go on to be with the Lord. We miss them dearly, but those aren't losses - but victories. Paul says it well:

Philippians 1:21 ESV 21 For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.

Those of us who are still standing here need to immerse ourselves in God's plans and throw ourselves into the roster of those still committed to work God's plans here. William Barclay has said: "It is one of the facts of human experience that we never know what we can do until we try. The impossible is always becoming the possible for the man (person) who will try with God."

Conclusion: Do you want to be a winner? You have to have faith. This faith is belief that Jesus is the Son of God, that he is God in the flesh who came to seek and save the lost.

Why are so many people slaughtered and lose the "game of life?" They have no defense - no prayer or devotional life. They have no offense - no weapons like the Word of God that is sharper than any two-edged sword.

If we know God, and He is within us, then we *can* win.

You know, goodness (good behavior) is easier in the company of God's people, but so many neglect meeting with other Christians. This only sets them up for defeat.

Barclay, *I John*, p. 126 - "The world did its worst to Jesus. It hunted Him and hounded Him and slandered Him. It branded Him heretic and sinner and friend of sinners (i.e., *guilt by association*). It judged Him, tried Him, crucified Him and buried Him. It did everything humanly possible to break Him and to eliminate Him - and it failed!"

Dr. James Strauss in his book, *Revelation*, p. 412, describes for us how Christians relate to the world.

1. “*Ghetto-Christianity* or a monastic withdrawal of the Church
2. *Pious Parallelism* where we live our lives separately and never engage
3. *Immersion in the world* generates the problem of being unable to distinguish between the Church and the world.
4. *Critical-interaction* seems to be the only serious attempt to fulfill our Lord’s request to be ‘in but not of the world.’”

Let's be busy with presenting the gospel to others so they also can be winners in this life and more importantly - the new life coming. If you have been “born of God,” you are already a winner by faith. Winning involves being actively against the world, its leader and values.

A Disciples Christian Church (open and affirming) in Katy, TX is promoting the gay lifestyle by having what they are calling *Drag Bingo*. Sometimes, Satan gets his influence in what some are calling church.

I found this helpful: *A liberal church* says you are welcome here and you do not have to clean up your life (ever). *A legalistic church* says you are not welcome here until you clean up your life. (You understand we are all sinners here, right?) Jesus says you are welcome here and I will change your life from the inside out. [John 8:10-11 ESV](#) 10 Jesus stood up and said to her, “Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?” 11 She said, “No one, Lord.” And Jesus said, “Neither do I condemn you; go, and from now on sin no more.”

There are two parts to being a winner spiritually:

1. Turning away from the world (losing team) and following and obeying God.
2. Live with the Spirit of God, using His power for the everyday training and then execute the will of God.

What kind of battle are we in? - one for the souls of humanity. Nicaragua is destroying churches and christian radio and TV. It is no longer safe to worship the Lord, but then again it is not safe to not worship Him. This is not like the famous hoaxes about Madalyn Murray O'Hare of years ago. This is real and happening now. What the church needs to say is being called hate speech. We must be bold and consistent in our witness - unafraind!

This life is like sudden death in a sport's play-off. There is a time coming when there are no other chances - no more quarters, innings or holes to play.

How is it we can overcome and be victorious in this life? Let's finish this sermon with God's words to all of us who claim Jesus as Savior.

John 16:33 ESV 33 I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world."

I John 2:13-14 ESV 13 I am writing to you, fathers, because you know him who is from the beginning. I am writing to you, young men, because you have overcome the evil one. I write to you, children, because you know the Father. 14 I write to you, fathers, because you know him who is from the beginning. I write to you, young men, because you are strong, and the word of God abides in you, and you have overcome the evil one.

Revelation 3:21 ESV 21 The one who conquers, I will grant him to sit with me on my throne, as I also conquered and sat down with my Father on his throne.

Don't give up --- and stay in the game: **Revelation 12:10-11 ESV** 10 And I heard a loud voice in heaven, saying, "Now the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of his Christ have come, for the accuser of our brothers[*and sisters*] has been thrown down, who accuses them day and night before our God. 11 And they have conquered him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, for they loved not their lives even unto death.

Revelation 14:13 ESV 13 And I heard a voice from heaven saying, "Write this: Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on." "Blessed indeed," says the Spirit, "that they may rest from their labors, for their deeds follow them!"

When we have trouble in our lives, those of us who follow the Savior hear Paul's words of encouragement in our ears. **Romans 8:37 ESV** 37 No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.

Are You a Winner? You can be if you are not.
You need to be on God's team and in His family though.