

Series: John's Letters

Title: Staying Strong in a Messed Up World

Text: 1 John 5:5-10

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Verse 5

In verse 5, John described the means by which one could overcome the world. The subject had been a focus earlier in his letter (1 John 2:13-16). Many of his readers were being duped into living for the fallen value system of the world, so John, with rightful concern, sought to orient his readers with God's truth on the subject. In our current verse, he said, "Who is the one who conquers the world but the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?" (1 John 5:5). The apostle's rhetorical question expected a positive response in the original language. He wanted to unequivocally demonstrate that faith in Jesus would make his readers victorious.

Such truth was important, considering the heresy being peddled in Asia Minor. The heretics denied that Jesus was God's Son. They did not believe He was divine, nor did they believe He had possessed a human body. John continually spoke against their error in his letter (1 John 1:1-2, 4:3, 4:15). In our current verse, he did so again, promoting the hypostatic union of Christ by using the title "Son of God." It emphasized both the human and divine aspect of Jesus' nature. To overcome the values of the world, one needed to have a faith that Jesus was the God-man. Faith in Him could make one spiritually strong.

Though John's words were important for his original readers, they have great meaning for us as well. Faith in the humanity and divinity of Jesus is the key to spiritual victory. When we live with an abiding trust that He lived and died for us, we experience His renewing power in our souls. Many, like John's readers, are sidetracked from the truth of Christ by cheap, spiritual substitutes. May we stand firm, always remembering that a faith in Christ is what gives us strength to overcome the world. In his letter to the Ephesians, Paul said, "In every situation take up the shield of faith with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one" (Ephesians 6:16). Though Satan and his world system are strong, Christ is stronger.

Verse 6

John further emphasized the nature of Jesus in verse 6 by saying, "Jesus Christ—he is the one who came by water and blood, not by water only, but by water and by blood. And the Spirit is the one who testifies, because the Spirit is the truth" (1 John 5:6). The apostle's words were intended to uphold the incarnation. The false teachers of Asia Minor denied the human nature of our Lord, believing that He was only a spiritual emanation from God. Their belief was based on their assumption that physical flesh was evil. Because of their teaching, John continually defended the humanity of our Lord (1 John 1:1-2, 3:5, 4:3, 4:15; 2 John 1:7).

John defended the incarnation in our current verse by saying, "he is the one who came." The word translated "came" is one that was used in the ancient world to speak of one making a public appearance.¹ John used it in the aorist tense, depicting a specific, past event.² His aim, as one as said, was to refer "to the incarnation as a definite historic event."³ The apostle wanted his readers to unequivocally know that Jesus had appeared in the flesh. His words evoke memories of the truth found in John 1:14 — "The Word became flesh and dwelt among us. We observed his glory, the glory as the one and only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth."

¹ Friberg, Friberg, and Miller, [CD-Rom].

² Robertson, [CD-Rom].

³ Robertson, [CD-Rom].

To support the historicity of the incarnation, John spoke of three different means through which Jesus revealed Himself. The first was “water.” The reference seems to have been to the baptism of our Lord (Mark 1:9-11). The event was significant, because it marked the inauguration of Jesus’ public ministry.⁴

In the context of John’s writing, the event was of special importance because of the teaching of the Gnostics. They believed a divine emanation descended upon Christ at His baptism. They reported that this entity assisted Jesus throughout His ministry, but left Him when He went to the cross.⁵ Apart from the aforementioned divine presence, Jesus wasn’t that special. John refuted such teaching by putting Jesus’ baptism in the proper place. Jesus was the Son of God. His baptism was the commencement of His earthly ministry. It was marked by the enabling of the Holy Spirit (Mark 1:10); however, Jesus never quit being God or man at any point in His earthly life.

The second means through which Jesus revealed Himself was His crucifixion. John referenced it in verse 5 by speaking of “blood.” The Gnostics minimized the importance of the cross, since they believed God completely abandoned Jesus during the crucifixion. They regarded the victim at Calvary as being nothing more than a mere man. Some believe they used Matthew 27:46 as a proof text for their system of belief.⁶ Since they saw Him as being simply human, and since they taught that human flesh was inferior to spiritual realities, the blood of Jesus had no significance in their doctrine.

John sought to correct the Gnostics’ erroneous views. He boldly proclaimed that Jesus “came by blood.” He knew that blood had special meaning in God’s plan of redemption. Since the beginning of time, blood was required for salvation from sin (Genesis 3:21). It served as a symbol of life in God’s economy of atonement (Leviticus 17:11). The Gnostics were unhinged from Scriptural truth. Jesus Himself had promoted the importance of His blood, saying, “Truly I tell you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you do not have life in yourselves” (John 6:53).

The Spirit was the final means through which Jesus revealed Himself. John said, “And the Spirit is the one who testifies, because the Spirit is the truth” (1 John 5:6). His point was that the Spirit had affirmed Jesus’ incarnation. None needed to doubt that Jesus really appeared in the flesh. The Spirit confirmed such to be true at Jesus’ incarnation (Matthew 1:18), baptism (Matthew 3:16), and crucifixion (Matthew 27:51-54). The Spirit’s testimony was reliable, since the Spirit was characterized by “truth.” Jesus Himself had spoken of the Third Person by calling Him “the Spirit of truth” (John 15:26). John’s readers should have trusted what the Spirit said about Jesus, not what the Gnostics said about Him.

Verses 7 and 8

In verses 7 and 8, John further summarized the content of what he said in verse 6 by saying, “For there are three that testify: the Spirit, the water, and the blood—and these three are in agreement” (1 John 5:7-8). Verse 7 seems rather short in modern translations. The reason is related to the difference reading found in older translations based on Erasmus’ Greek text. The King James Version of 1 John 5:7 reads, “For there are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost: and these three are one.”

It seems that either Erasmus or one of the texts he used attempted to provide support for the doctrine of the Trinity by adding to John’s original words. There is no need to regard modern

⁴ Walvoord and Zuck, [CD-Rom].

⁵ Gundry, Robert. *A Survey of the New Testament*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012), 536.

⁶ Gundry, 536.

translations as being inferior because they do not include Erasmus' reference to the Trinity. The absence of the Trinity in our passage does the Trinity no harm. Modern translations still give ample support to the fact that God exists in three persons.

Furthermore, mention of the Trinity may seem a bit out of place in verse 7. John's point in verses 7 and 8 was to recap what he said in verse 6. The word translated "for" at the beginning of verse 7 indicated that the apostle was making an assertion based on what was said previously. The author was aiming to make a conclusion on what he had just said about the water, blood, and Spirit. He concluded that all three gave witness to the divine and human nature of Jesus. He used a word ("testify") that was often used of a firsthand eyewitness who testified in a court of law. John meant to unequivocally prove that Jesus was one hundred percent God and one hundred percent man. The testimony of "the Spirit, the water, and the blood" supported his claims. The Gnostics were wrong.

Verse 9

John further dismissed the Gnostics' teaching in verse 9 by saying, "If we accept human testimony, God's testimony is greater, because it is God's testimony that he has given about his Son" (1 John 5:9). The apostle presented a hypothetical scenario. Using a conditional statement, he conveyed the folly of listening to the Gnostic heretics. If any amongst the churches in Asia Minor were giving credence to the "human testimony" of such teachers, they should have stopped and realized that "God's testimony" was "greater."

The believers in Asia Minor needed to refocus their attention on "God's testimony." He had given sufficient truth "about His Son." They would have been wise to value the testimony of the Lord over the testimony of mere men. The Lord's witness needed to take precedence in their lives.

John's words remind us of our need to have a high esteem for the revealed Word of God. The philosophies of men come and go. They never provide us with a firm footing for our faith. To be spiritually strong and secure, we must build our beliefs on the Bible. God's revelation of Himself is better than man's perspective. One has said, "The Word of God must take precedence over the word of people — because people make mistakes; they are finite and are often wrong. God is omniscient and makes no mistakes. He speaks with authority. The Bible is true...God's Word is absolute, inerrant, and infallible truth, and when its teachings conflict with the teachings of men, we must believe God."⁷ John's readers needed to be reminded of such realities, and we often do too.

Verse 10

Because of the prevalence of the Gnostic heresy, churches in Asia Minor were undoubtedly divided. Some held to orthodox, Apostolic teaching, while others were buying into a new "special knowledge." John differentiated between the two groups in verse 10, saying, "The one who believes in the Son of God has this testimony within himself. The one who does not believe God has made him a liar, because he has not believed in the testimony God has given about his Son" (1 John 5:10).

John first spoke of "one who believes in the Son of God." Such a person was a true believer. He had "this testimony within himself." The reference was to the way in which the Spirit of God indwelt true believers. In accepting the the testimony concerning Christ described in verses 7 and 8, one internalized that testimony into his soul.⁸ John's word remind us

⁷ Phillips, John B. *Exploring the Epistles of John*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 2003), 168.

⁸ Walvoord and Zuck, 901.

that true Christians possess God's truth, but they are also possessed by it. Through the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit, they have an ever-present guide concerning the testimonies of Jesus (John 8:32 and 1 John 2:27).

The Gnostics were different. They didn't "believe God;" that is, they did not have faith in the teaching of Jesus and His apostles. The word translated "believed" referred to an action with abiding results.⁹ The Gnostics' lack of faith had drastic implications, even eternal consequences. Though they boasted of light and knowledge, they were in the dark. They were blind to true spiritual truth. How one responds to Scripture's claims concerning Jesus is of utmost importance.

The end result of the Gnostics' denial was that they made God "a liar." By dismissing what He said about His Son through the prophets and apostles, they cast aspersions on His character. Their teachings concerning the human and spiritual nature of Jesus were in direct opposition to what God had said. They were guilty of making an affront against God's truth. The one who doubts Scripture's estimation of Jesus ultimately "impugns God's veracity."¹⁰ The original language of the text depicted an act that resulted in a permanent state.¹¹ Those who rejected God's witness concerning His Son were given over to a finalized state of apostasy. They weren't true believers and there was little hope for them. They had made their choice and cast their lot. They would soon fall away from the church, proving their lack of real faith (1 John 5:16).

⁹ Rogers Jr. and Rogers III, 599.

¹⁰ Walvoord and Zuck, 902.

¹¹ Robertson, [CD-Rom].