

## 1 John 5:4-5

**1Jn 5:4 For whatever is born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world--our faith. 5 Who is he who overcomes the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?**

It is important not to lose sight of what John has consistently been doing in this letter. He has been giving the New Testament definition of what it means to truly be a Christian. He has not deviated from that purpose, and he has not wavered in his dogmatism relative to the defining attributes that he has provided for his definition. In beginning these two verses, it is important to appreciate that they are directly linked to [1 John 5:1-3](#), and specifically to the statement that the commandments of God are not “burdensome” to the believer. So in connection with v4-5, whenever the believer honors God’s commands, what that obedience does is to empower the believer to be an overcomer and to overcome the world. In reading these two verses, the word “**overcome(s)**” ought to immediately jump out to the reader. It is used three times in two verses and certainly is one of the main points of this passage. The Greek word for “**overcomes**” is “*nikao*”. It is a word that means to conquer, prevail, and to be victorious over something.<sup>1</sup> Because the word is in the present tense, it means that the believer is constantly overcoming the world and that those times when they may be defeated are the exception and not the rule.<sup>2</sup> Just its definition implies that there is a spiritual battle that will confront the believer. It is an ongoing confrontation that cannot be minimized in the believer’s life because its ultimate purpose is to destroy and damage the believer’s life. The individual who has no awareness of this ongoing spiritual conflict in life simply is not saved. The moment that I was personally saved I knew immediately that my life is now engaged in a spiritual conflict of which I had been previously unaware.

The power of sin is really very great and unfortunately there are many who fall prey to its deception and are unsuspectingly lured into eternal judgment because of it.<sup>3</sup> They lose the battle and they are the ones who are overcome. Jesus said the following to His disciples in [John 16:33](#),

**Jn 16:33 "These things I have spoken to you, so that in Me you may have peace. In the world you have tribulation, but take courage; I have overcome the world."**

In this verse John is speaking specifically about the fact Christ has conquered the satanic opposition that is prevalent in the world<sup>4</sup>, and he is telling His disciples that all of those who truly belong to Christ can also overcome and persevere in a fallen world. The idea here is that even though the battle is not yet over for the Christian, the outcome has already been secured. The contest is over. I saw the score recently of a football game that was in the fourth quarter with about three minutes left to play in the game. The score was 59 – 0. Now the game was not yet over, but the outcome was. That is what Jesus wanted his disciples to fully understand. [Romans 8:37](#) says,

**Ro 8:37 Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us.**

The Greek word for “**conquerors**” in this verse is “*hypernikao*”. The prefix “*hyper*” simply means above, beyond, exceedingly, or exceedingly above. It could actually be translated as “we are hyper-conquerors” or we are preeminently victorious.<sup>5</sup> What makes it possible for the believer to be a conqueror and to overcome the world is simply the fact that now they are actually and spiritually united to Christ. Christ can never be removed from whatever is victorious in the believer’s life. He is the

source of victory. He is the power that enables the believer to overcome. The way that Jesus stated this in John 15:5 was that **“apart from me you can do nothing”**.

The actual phrase **“we are more than conquerors”** in v37 is just one Greek word. It is the same Greek word for **“overcomes”**, but it is greatly intensified because of the prefix. The strength of this word is really very important to embrace and grasp. What it is saying is that in an eternal sense, Christ has conquered everything that could in any way keep us from Him or out of His kingdom. So when we translate that into a practical meaning for our personal lives, what it is stating is that believers should never be consistently overcome by sin in their life, but to the contrary they are the ones who are the conquerors and overcomers over sin. There is not one biblical reason why any believer should be consistently overcome by sin in their life - not one single reason. That statement is not intended in any way to discredit the actual struggle that every believer faces in their battle with sin because that struggle is very real. [1 Corinthians 15:57-58](#) gives some encouragement,

<sup>1Co 15:57</sup> **But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.**  
<sup>58</sup>**Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord.**

The verb **“gives”** is in the present tense / active voice which means that God is always giving every believer the **“victory”** that they need through Jesus Christ. The Greek word for **“victory”** (*nike*) comes from the same Greek root word for **“overcomes”** (*nikao*). Believers have to remain steadfast and immovable in God’s calling on their life. They simply cannot allow the world and all of its spiritual allurements and enticements to distract them from doing what they know is right. The more that a believer chooses to do the right thing, the more they will overcome. Obviously, sin is very powerful and very alluring, and it would be facetious on my part to characterize it in any way as being impotent because it certainly is not. When Paul says to **“be steadfast”**, the verb **“be”** is in the imperative mood which makes it a command. Any time that the Word of God gives the believer a command, it becomes their privilege and responsibility to do what has been commanded. Every believer has to have a personal resolve and a spiritual mindset that they will be **“steadfast”** relative to overcoming sin in their life. The imperative mood of the verb makes this non-optional for the believer. In other words, like any other thing in the Christian life that has meaning and purpose for the believer, this is an area that has to be constantly worked on and overcome. Just because a believer may fail sometimes in their struggle with sin does not mean or even imply that they have been overcome by that sin. It simply means that they need to develop the resolve and the determination to not let sin overcome that particular area of their life. It is the testing in various difficult temptations and trying areas that reveals the level of a believer’s commitment in allowing God to work deeply in their life. [1 Peter 4:12](#) states it this way,

<sup>1Pe 4:12</sup> **Beloved, do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened to you;**

Some of the translations (NIV, ESV, NASB, ASV, ISV, RSV, and NRSV) say **“do not be surprised”** - which actually seems to capture the meaning of the word best. Spiritual testings are very normal because they are God’s method for developing His character in the believer’s life.

For believers, it really is a very important truth to understand that the conflict between God and Satan is not a conflict between two equal entities as if there was some concern about the actual outcome. When

Christ died on the cross, obviously Satan believed that he had won the spiritual conflict that began in the garden. The truth and outcome, however, is actually the exact opposite of what he had anticipated. Through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, God the Father proclaimed that Christ had overcome sin, death, and judgment. [Colossians 2:15](#) says,

**Col 2:15 When He had disarmed the rulers and authorities, He made a public display of them, having triumphed over them through Him.**

The word “**disarmed**” is “*apekdyomai*” and simply means to strip off clothes. What is not readily seen in this translation is that the word “**disarmed**” is in the middle voice. The middle voice is one of the more peculiar phenomena of the Greek language. It describes the subject as participating in the results of the action. It relates the action more intimately to the subject.<sup>6</sup> In the case of this verse, it could be translated “**having put off from Himself**”. It seems that when we simply read this verse that immediately what we think is that He “**disarmed the rulers and authorities**” for us, and in some ways that is very true. However, the middle voice gives the word “**disarmed**” a different meaning and connotation. What God did was for Christ. Certainly it may have implications for the believer, but that is not the primary emphasis or focus in this verse. The emphasis is that the resurrection of Jesus Christ was God’s way of publicly vindicating His Son. The most significant event of all history had taken place and was completely meaningless to the world. The resurrection, however, completely stripped the world and its rulers and authorities, as well as all of the powers of darkness that existed of anything that could be considered a victory. They were now seen to be what they had always been - utterly powerless before a holy God.

The world, the flesh, and the devil did everything that they could to defeat Jesus Christ. No leaf was left unturned in their efforts, and it initially appeared that they had been victorious in their efforts. However, through the resurrection, Jesus Christ took all of their efforts and just stripped them and removed them from His person. They were stripped and divested of any power or any authority that they thought that they had over Him. On the cross they had literally stripped Christ naked. This was a common practice where the prisoner was led naked to the place of crucifixion as a display of the Romans’ triumph over the criminal. It was their way of increasing the criminal’s humiliation and defeat. So when Christ was resurrected, what God did was to humiliate the ones who had crucified Christ. They were now spiritually naked and void of any spiritual power over Christ or His kingdom. They were the ones who were now defeated and humiliated, and the worst sin that Satan and the world could ever commit against God now became the source of salvation for everyone who would believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. No one, absolutely no one is able to defeat God and His purposes. That is the message to the believer.

So exactly what is it that allows the believer to be an overcomer? Well, [1 John 3:4](#) says that it is “**faith**” and “**the one who believes**”. The word “**faith**” and the word “**believes**” are from the same family of words. “**Faith**” is “*pistis*” and refers to a person’s persuasion and conviction relative to the truth of God.<sup>7</sup> It is the critical element of relying solely on Christ for salvation. It is what a person actually “**believes**”. It is the element of their life that controls them. “**Faith**” is a deep seated conviction in the truth of God’s Word and of how an individual is able to have a saving relationship with God. “**Faith**” believes that God exists and that He is the creator of all things, the ruler of all things, and the only source of salvation available to an individual.<sup>8</sup> The predominant idea behind the word “**faith**” is that of trusting and relying on Christ. “**Faith**” cannot be considered to be genuine in a person’s life apart from the

attribute of faithfulness and fidelity. No one would think that someone actually loved their husband or their wife if they were not faithful and devoted to them, and the same is true in the spiritual realm.

So when talking about biblical **“faith”**, the word carries the idea of being firmly persuaded and convinced of the truth in such a way that it becomes the deepest conviction of the person’s life. This kind of casual, superficial, sporadic, nonchalant, unconcerned, indifferent, lethargic, shallow, artificial kind of faith that is so prevalent in the American church culture will only condemn people to an eternity without Christ. It does not fit the definition of biblical **“faith”**. It is not even close. It is a substitute that has no saving power whatsoever. In God’s call on a person’s life, there is no alternative for **“faith”** that is firmly persuaded and convinced of who Christ is and what it means to be His follower. When Jesus Christ is truly believed on, it will always result in the transformation of that person’s character and of how they live. That is the spiritual outcome of genuine biblical faith. This is an undeniable and sustainable New Testament truth that cannot be avoided. At a personal level, I am deeply concerned for many people who seem to be utterly void of the virtues and characteristics of biblical faith, but still believe themselves to be a Christian because of some non-transforming decision that they once made. That is why this weak cultural definition of faith and what it means to truly be saved is so damning. Either a person is firmly persuaded and deeply convinced of the reality of the saving grace and truth of Jesus Christ or they are not. If they are persuaded, then that persuasion and that conviction will control every area of their life. It cannot work any other way.

Someone is going to ask how can they know that they truly have this genuine **“faith”**? Well, simply notice what John says repeatedly in v4 and v5. He says the same thing three times. He says that the individual is someone who **“overcomes the world”** - **“whatever is born of God overcomes the world”** (v4), **“this is the victory that has overcome the world--our faith”** (v4), and **“Who is he who overcomes the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?”** The way that a person can know that they are truly saved is that they are constantly overcoming the world and their love of it. Stated in a different way, the world is not overcoming them. The following are some simple evidences of genuine faith:

- (1) Believers are not succumbing to the lust of the flesh that is constantly being promoted by the world.
- (2) Believers are deeply grieved in their spirit when they violate God’s Word.
- (3) Believers consistently find themselves engaged in spiritual struggles.
- (4) Believers are victorious over the world’s ungodly philosophies, ideas, beliefs, systems, and values.
- (5) Believers understand the nature of the conflict and are spiritually engaged in that conflict.
- (6) Believers do not believe that the commandments of God are burdensome or grievous.
- (7) A believer’s life is being transformed by the Word of God.
- (8) Believers are becoming more like Christ in their behavior and thinking.
- (9) Believers deeply believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God that saves sinners.

So the question that has to be asked is whether or not that describes the individual's life. If it does, then they should be fully assured that they have truly believed in the Lord Jesus Christ and are one of his children. That is John's answer in these verses.

## ENDNOTES

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<sup>1</sup> Strong, 1252.

<sup>2</sup> Wuest, 174.

<sup>3</sup> Harris, *overcome*, electronic page.

<sup>4</sup> Renn, 705.

<sup>5</sup> Strong, 1427.

<sup>6</sup> Dana, 157.

<sup>7</sup> Strong, 1315.

<sup>8</sup> Strong, 1315.

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