

**SERIES: Authentic Christian Community/1 John, Wk. 4**

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**Message Title: Overcoming the World Pt. 2**

**Release Date: Tuesday 2/25/2020**

When we sin, it bothers us. When we sin, we're grieved. There's something deep within us that says, "I don't want to live that way; I don't want to offend God," and we feel the sorrow of that; we feel the conviction of that; we feel the grief of that. It's a very sobering text to remind us: if we can sin as a way of life and that just simply doesn't bother us, we have every reason to believe that we've never really experienced the life-changing power of Jesus. It's important to remind ourselves, just because we know the right answers on a quiz doesn't mean we've ever really embraced the message and experienced Jesus' transformational power in our lives.

He [John] goes on in Chapter 3 and reminds us again, starting in Verse 11. He goes back to the topic of love and how important it is that we love as Jesus has loved. And basically he says because this is true — this is what's in us; this is what will flow out of us — no longer can we look at the world and its brokenness, and its pain, and its suffering, and its struggles, and just not care. Something is changed inside of us. Our heart grieves and there's something that says, "This isn't the way it's supposed to be," and we get this vision for what God intended for the world, and there's something in us that says, "This world is not acceptable, and I can't just sit by and watch it." And so this love of God begins to flow through us, but the problem is, we don't always act on that. We aren't always as loving as we should be; we aren't always as active as we should be about doing the right thing; and so our hearts condemn us and say, "You know you're a lousy Christian. If you were a good Christian, you would have loved more; you would have done this; you would have done that," and what John says is, "That's part of what's happening inside." We've changed, and sometimes we don't live that way and our heart condemns us. But God comes along and says, "Even though your heart condemns you, it condemns you because you've been radically changed, because you're being changed from the inside-out," and God knows the truth and He says, "I'm making you into a magnificent child of mine," and over and over again, we're reminded that **God is changing us from the inside-out.**

At the end of that text, we reminded ourselves, that one of the big things that prohibits community in Christian circles, is we have a tendency to pick at each other. Now that we understand the bar is way up here, and now we understand this is how we should live, we have a tendency to kind of judge one-another and pick at one-another, remind ourselves of everything we're doing wrong — and we reminded ourselves that nobody really likes to be fixed. If every time I show up with a group of people, they pick at me and they're trying to fix me, and they remind me of all the ways I've let God down today, I really don't want to be around those people; I don't need more of that. But rather, we need to take one out of God's playbook, and say, "Even though you may be discouraged, even though you may feel like you didn't measure up today, what's happening inside of you is absolutely magnificent. God is changing you from the inside-out." **We need to spend more time encouraging, more time celebrating, more time actually believing that God is doing a radical work** and say, "These are all the ways that I see

it in your life, and it's real and it's true and I do believe it's going to come to pass, and let's celebrate that together."

John goes on, then, in Chapter 4. He reminds us that we need to **test the spirits**. Not everyone that says, "This is from God," is really speaking for God. We need to test the spirits, and make sure that what's being said as coming from God, or coming from the Spirit of God, or even coming from the Bible, actually is. And then John took us back again: **the first test is always having to do with the person and work of Jesus — understanding who Jesus is and what Jesus has done for us**. If any so-called Christian organization misses on that one, it's a miss; it's counterfeit! It's always where we start.

And then finally, again, we went back to this theme of love, and John reminded us that the theology of love is not just religious theory; it's not theological theory; but that, at a point in time, God manifested His love; He demonstrated his love. He rolled up His sleeves and entered into the mess. God gave up His own Son, knowing that He would be rejected, knowing He would be flogged, knowing He would be mocked, knowing He would be spat upon, knowing that He ultimately would be tortured to death. He knew that when He gave up His own Son, it was the only way that we might experience the forgiveness of sin and a relationship with Him. Therefore, we understand that even though life can be hard, life can be confusing, life can be painful, life can sometimes cause us to wonder, "Where is God in all of this?" the **one thing we cannot doubt is the love of God**. It's not just theory. **God acted on His love and demonstrated His love with the ultimate gift for us**. Therefore **we should love one another as God has loved us**. All of that, then, brings us to Chapter 5, and John kind of brings all this together, then. He says,

**Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God, (\*NASB, 1 John 5:1a)**

Now this again, as you've just heard, this is a theme throughout the letter—that Jesus Christ is front-and-center. He's the cornerstone of the message that John is proclaiming. Now basically, the text is not saying that if you believe in Jesus Christ, you are born again. Now that's true — it's one hundred percent true — but that's not the point he's making here. The point he's making here is the other way around, and we know that by the verb tenses. The verb **...born of God** is in a perfect tense, which tells us he's referring to something that happened in the past, but has an ongoing effect. So he's saying, "If you've been born again (in the past), then you believe that Jesus is the Christ (present-tense)." So in other words he's saying, "If you've really experienced new birth, then you proclaim Jesus as the Christ." And the logic of that would be, because you've been radically changed. Again the language of the text is radical. John is the originator of this language *born again*. It shows up in his Gospel and it shows up again in his epistle. Some of us have heard the language so much, we fail to realize that, "This is radical. This isn't that I've been remodeled; this isn't that I've been refurbished; this isn't that I have new siding on the outside. This is I've been radically changed — I've been completely reborn."

This is the reason why you can't go back. The old me doesn't exist anymore. I'm reborn; I've been completely transformed. I have a new nature; I have the seed of God. I'm a child of God; I have the Spirit of God. Something within me is radically new and different. That's what the text is saying, and what he's saying is: if you've been born of God — if you've experienced that — then obviously you affirm Jesus as the Christ, because you have the very nature of Christ; you have the Spirit of Christ; you're a child of God. How could you not affirm Jesus as the Christ?

The false teachers were saying, “Yes, we’ve had that experience with God, but we don’t think that Jesus is the Christ.” And John is saying, “No way — it’s not possible.”

Now this is very helpful for understanding assurance of Salvation. When I get into these discussions with my theological friends that believe you can lose your Salvation, the discussion always goes around this idea of *free-will*. “Well, we believe that you have free-will, so, just as you accepted Jesus, if at some point along the way you choose to, you can reject Jesus.” That makes sense, if the only thing that happened was a business transaction, where you got a ticket to Heaven and, at any point along the way, you can choose to give your ticket back. But that’s not the language of the New Testament. The language of the New Testament is absolutely radical. You’ve actually been *born again*. Again, the reason you can’t go back is because there is no *back*. Paul says to the Corinthians that, *Old things are passed away; all things have become new*. That person doesn’t even exist anymore. I’ve been born of God; I have the seed of God; I have the nature of God. Everything’s radically changed. So, if that’s true that I have the Spirit of God, if that’s true that I have the nature of God, if that’s true that I have the seed of God, if I’ve been so radically changed, how could the very nature of Christ, the very Spirit of Christ, deny Jesus is the Christ? Jesus would be denying Himself. How could Jesus do that? He’s not schizophrenic; He’s not double-minded. Jesus would never say, “I don’t exist.” So the logic is: if that’s who’s in me now, then that would be the affirmation that Jesus is the Christ — rock solid into eternity.

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**Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God, and whoever loves the Father loves the *child* born of Him. By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and observe His commandments.** (1 John 5:1-2)

Now that feels like it goes in circles. Actually, it does. John is saying that if we love the Father, we love His children. That makes sense. But then he goes on to say, “How do we love the children? — by loving God.” You say, “Well that feels like it’s going in circles,” and it is. But it’s gone in circles through the whole letter, because constantly what he has said is, “This is a package deal.” Because, if you experience God’s love, it’s not that we love God; it’s that God loved us, and God has radically changed us from the inside-out. But the fact is He *has* changed us. So now, as a result of His love in us, we love Him. If we love Him, we love His children, because we have the love of God, and God loves His children. So how do we love his children? — by loving God! It’s a package deal; you can’t separate it out. The false teachers were saying, “We love God,” but they hated the people, and what John is saying is, “It doesn’t work that way. **If you love God, you love His children. You love His children by loving God and keeping His commandments.**

Verse 3 is very important:

**For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments; and His commandments are not burdensome.**

This is really helpful to distinguish. Do I really get this thing? Do I really understand who God is? Do I understand what He’s done for me? And one of the ways to measure this, is to come back and say, “Do I consider **His commandments burdensome**? Are they a blessing or are they a burden?” Religion is driven by fear; religion is driven by intimidation. It’s this idea that *somehow we must appease the gods. If we don’t appease the gods, they’re going to whack us. So here are the rules; here are the regulations; here’s the religion. This is what you must do, in order to earn God’s favor, or at least prevent God from whacking you.* And so that’s what it becomes. This is religion — cold and stale. Strangely enough, there’s something about that that appeals to people. One of the reasons is, because it fits perfectly with the world’s operating

system. It makes perfect sense. *That's the way everything else in life works; that must be the way God works.* So we say, "That makes sense." But it also appeals to us, because there's a certain clarity to it. That's why people thrive on legalism. There's kind of this safety to it, because it's "Here are the rules; do this; don't do that, and everything will be okay," and people like that. It's like at work, when your boss says, "This is exactly what you have to do to get a promotion." At least you say, "Okay, I get it. That's exactly what's required of me."

The problem is: nobody can keep the rules. Nobody maintains the standards, and there's this constant sense in which I'm failing; I'm not keeping up; it's a burden; it's a ball-and-chain, and you feel the weight of religion, day after day after day, until people finally get to the point where, "I can't take this anymore; I can't take this guilt and this shame and this condemnation and this burden, day after day after day. I've had it up to here with religion, I've had it up to here with God — I'm out of here!" And often people think, in doing that, they have experienced God, and it didn't work. They have no idea that they have only experienced cold, stale, lifeless religion. That is nothing like what God is. God is a Heavenly Daddy who loves His children, who loves to celebrate His children and delight in His children. He has invited us, at the cost of His own Son, to dance with Him in the light forever — to celebrate, to experience joy, to experience freedom, to experience life. But there has to be a roadmap. He hasn't left us just to meander through life and learn everything the hard way. **His commandments are His way of saying, "This is the way to life. This is what you need to know.** You need to say, 'Yes,' to this; you need to say, 'No' to this, in order to find the life that I want you to have."

Now, over the years, I've done well over two hundred weddings, and, at every single wedding, there's a point in time, where the bride and groom are committing to something like this: "Do you commit to forsake all others, for the sake of pursuing intimacy with this one person whom you love, the rest of your life?" Never in over two hundred weddings have I ever had a bride or groom, at that moment in the ceremony say, "Ohhhh! What a burden! You've got to be kidding me!" Actually, it's just the opposite. In that moment, they are so in love, as they look into each other's eyes, that's the whole point. "I've made a decision to forsake all others, because I want to spend the rest of my life pursuing intimacy with you." I've never had a bride or groom see that as a burden. That's exactly what God is doing. As a Heavenly Daddy that loves His children, He's saying, "Listen, this is the way to life; this is the way to freedom; this is the way to everything your soul's longing for. These are the things that you cannot do. These are intimacy destroyers; these are destructive. But *these* are the things that lead to the life you're looking for." **God's commandments are not a burden. They're a blessing; they're the roadmap to life.**

He goes on in Verse 4 and says:

**For whatever is born of God overcomes the world; and this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith. Who is the one who overcomes the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God? (Vs. 4-5)**

Once again he uses this word **overcome**. This is one of his favorite terms. Overcome implies a battle and it implies a victor. The battle is against the world, meaning the world's system. The architect of the world's system intends for you to be destroyed. That's the way the system is set up. This very day the stores, the malls, the streets, the neighborhoods, the homes around us will be filled with people who the world is destroying. They feel the pain of that; they feel this thing is broken. Their dream is turned into a nightmare. They're lonely; they're isolated; they're broken; they're in despair; they're in pain; they're struggling; they wonder, "Is there any hope? Is there any way out?" but they simply don't know where to turn. "Where is there life? Is there any way to overcome this system that feels like it's going to destroy me?" And in the midst of their pain, they don't know where to turn, so they turn to more destructive behaviors. They turn

to alcohol; they turn to drugs; they turn to pornography; they turn to materialism; they turn to power; they turn to position; they turn to pleasure; they turn to something —something that can set me *free*. But none of it works, and the hole gets deeper and deeper and deeper and deeper, and the question is, “Is there any way out?” This is a moment where I’d like to stand on a table at the mall and say, “Yes! It’s the whole point. It’s the whole reason why God rolled up His sleeves and got in the middle of the mess. It’s the whole reason why He gave up His Son to die, that **through believing that God tells the truth, this is the way out.** This is the way that **overcomes the world.** This is the reason for hope. The whole story of Christmas is God’s willingness to give us what we desperately needed to overcome the world and find life in Him.” Maybe you’re feeling the pain; maybe you’re feeling the despair; maybe you’re feeling the brokenness; maybe you feel the sense that this isn’t working. This system that has defined my life is breaking down, and my life’s a mess, and I don’t know where to turn, and I wonder, “Is there any hope?” The answer is, “Yes, yes — this one who came — Jesus — to be the Christ, to be the Savior, that His body would be broken, His blood would be shed, that we might experience His life, that we might **overcome**, get victory over a system intended to destroy us, and experience His life now and forever. You don’t have to go out and *get good*; you don’t have to go out and *do religion*; you don’t have to crawl a mile on broken glass; **you just have to be willing to — in brokenness and humility — receive the gift He offers — in order that you might have life.**

*Our Father, we’re thankful that when we were desperately lost in our sin, when the world’s system was busy destroying us, God, You sent Your Son into this messy world. You sent Your Son, knowing that He would be mocked, rejected, and tortured to death, but knowing it was the only way that You could offer this Salvation freely as a gift. Lord, my prayer would be that every single person would experience this victory, would experience this life, would know what it feels like to experience the love of a Heavenly Daddy that wants to enjoy us with Him forever.  
In Jesus’ Name, Amen.*

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John reminds us a good test to see if I really understand the truth is, if we keep His commandments and His commandments are not burdensome. You know right from the beginning, the serpent tried to convince Adam and Eve that God is not as good as you think He is, and He is more restrictive than He is generous. It’s the same lie today. **The truth is that God’s commands lead to life; they prevent us from unnecessary pain.** I like to think of God’s commands as train tracks. On one hand you could say that train tracks are restrictive. They do restrict where the train can and can’t go. Yes, that’s true, but in another sense, it’s the tracks that set the train free to fulfill its purpose. If you’ve ever seen a train off the tracks, you realize it’s not going anywhere. There are people listening that are hurting, they are confused, they’ve made a mess of things, and they wonder if there’s any hope. I would just ask you to consider, you’ve tried it your way. Now you’ve made a mess. **Are you willing to consider surrendering to God and doing it God’s way, to experience Salvation and new life in Christ?** He offers that to you as a gift. I pray you’ll receive it.