

A Conquering Faith

Whether we're talking about being born physically or spiritually, we know that there are certain characteristics marking those in the same family. Physical similarities—like the color of your eyes or hair; the size of your frame; or how you walk, talk, smile. The size and shape of nose and other characteristics not so readily detectable—mark you as being in a certain family. The same is true for those of us sharing a spiritual birth in Christ. We're distinguished from the world—and we're also marked as brothers and sisters.

One identifying marker is our love for God. It is a love that transforms duty into desire. I once read about an author hiring a young woman to type his manuscripts for him. But as they shared daily contact—talking about the author's words and their individual lives—the two of them fell in love and got married. After that, the young woman continued to type her husband's manuscripts—but much more lovingly so. Now she typed his manuscripts not for pay but to please the one she loved.

Another marker is our love for other believers. When you're born, you're born into a family. When you're born again, you're born into a family called "the church." The night prior to going to the Cross, Jesus prayed that we would love each other. John saw this love as the proving ground of our love for God, writing, "Anyone who claims to be in the light but hates a brother or sister is still in the darkness. Anyone who loves their brother and sister lives in the light, and there is nothing in them to make them stumble" (1 John 2:9).

1. Fill in the blank: I knew Jesus loved me when

2. How confident are you that Jesus loves you? Explain your answer.

3. What are some ways you can love like Jesus?

LESSON FOCUS: Loving like Jesus gives us confidence that we live in God.

Recognizing the Spirit

1 John 4:2-3, 13-15, KJV

2 Hereby know ye the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God:

3 And every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God: and this is that spirit of antichrist, whereof ye have heard that it should come; and even now already is it in the world....

13 Hereby know we that we dwell in him, and he in us, because he hath given us of his Spirit.

14 And we have seen and do testify that the Father sent the Son to be the Saviour of the world.

15 Whosoever shall confess that Jesus is the Son of God, God dwelleth in him, and he in God.

1 John 4:2-3, 13-15, NIV

²This is how you can recognize the Spirit of God: Every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God,³but every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you have heard is coming and even now is already in the world....

¹³This is how we know that we live in him and he in us: He has given us of his Spirit. ¹⁴And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son to be the Savior of the world. ¹⁵If anyone acknowledges that Jesus is the Son of God, God lives in them and they in God.

At the opening of 1 John 4, the apostle challenged his readers to not blindly accept every teaching or spirit—that is, a person influenced by a spirit, either the Holy Spirit or a demonic spirit. Rather, they should “test the spirits to see whether they are from God,” in light of the many false prophets in their midst (vs. 1). He then clarified how they could recognize what came from God: “Every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God” (vs. 2). Conversely, any spirit that did not acknowledge Jesus or His incarnation was from “the spirit of the antichrist, which you have heard is coming and even now is already in the world” (vs. 3). The fact that the spirit of the antichrist was present was, again, clearly evident from the multitude of false teachers around them.

Having made clear how to recognize the presence of the Holy Spirit, John explained how believers could know with certainty that they belonged to Christ: God had given His Spirit to dwell within them, guide them, and remind them “that we live in him and he in us” (vs. 13). Because of this, every believer had already “seen and [could] testify that the Father has sent his Son to be the Savior of the world” (vs. 14). The working of the Spirit, sent by the Father, reminded believers of the hope they had in Christ.

It is worth remembering that John wrote this letter roughly 60 years after Jesus’ death and resurrection. Thus, when he spoke of “testifying,” he was probably not speaking primarily of “eyewitness testimony”—aside from his own, of course. By the time he wrote this letter, John might have been the only eyewitness left. Rather, John was speaking of God’s children “see[ing] and testify[ing]” through their own spiritual eyes. They too, by faith, had seen and could speak of the reality of God’s presence, because of what the resurrected Christ had already done in their midst collectively, and in their hearts individually.

Thus, John summed up: “If anyone acknowledges that Jesus is the Son of God, God lives in them and they in God” (vs. 15). Their very testimony was evidence of the Spirit of Christ living within them.

4. *How could believers know whether a spirit was from God?*

5. *How could believers know that they belonged to Christ?*

6. *Because of these truths, what kind of testimony did John say believers should have?*

Living in God’s Overcoming Love

1 John 4:16-17; 5:4-5, KJV

16 And we have known and believed the love that God hath to us. God is love; and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in

1 John 4:16-17; 5:4-5, NIV

¹⁶And so we know and rely on the love God has for us. God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in

KJV
him.

17 Herein is our love made perfect, that we may have boldness in the day of judgment: because as he is, so are we in this world....

4 For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world: and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith.

5 Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God?

NIV

them. ¹⁷This is how love is made complete among us so that we will have confidence on the day of judgment: In this world we are like Jesus....

⁴For everyone born of God overcomes the world. This is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith. ⁵Who is it that overcomes the world? Only the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God.

Having established how believers could know they are God's children, John now went on to tell them how to express the reality of Christ's love to the world. Because these believers acknowledged that Jesus is the Son of God, through the inner conviction of the Spirit, they could also "know and rely on the love God has for us" (4:16). And because "God is love," that reality would be expressed through the Church's love for one another and those around them: "Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in them." A love-filled existence reflects a God-filled life.

That "we know and rely on the love God has for us" can be a source of great joy for every believer. As Christians live in a community of mutual love with other believers, it results in an intimate experience of God's love and a renewed faith in that love. Once again John reaffirmed the truth that everyone who abides in love experiences intimate fellowship with God.

At the same time, John made clear that the consequences of living in love went far beyond immediate acts of service or compassion: "This is how love is made complete among us so that we will have confidence on the day of judgment: In this world we are like Jesus" (vs. 17). On the day of judgment, and eternally beyond, God's children will commune openly with Him and not be ashamed, because of their communion with Him even now. John intended this to give believers confidence, even as they contended with the world.

John then made an even bolder statement about the

believer's future: "Everyone born of God overcomes the world. This is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith" (5:4). As Jesus abided in the Father and experienced total victory, so every believer could also experience victory over the world through Him. As they live like Christ here on earth, they could have confidence in the midst of this world, and beyond. When faith is the foundation of our works, the burden of obedience seems light. Faith in Christ is the Christian's secret weapon against a dark world system controlled by Satan. As John said, "Who is it that overcomes the world? Only the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God" (vs. 5). This was no promise of a trouble-free life. And yet, as Jesus said while on earth—and as John recorded in his Gospel, "In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world" (John 16:33).

So, the apostle affirmed that believers do indeed overcome the world through their faith in Christ. If the means for continued victory over the world is obedience to God's commandments, then obedience to those commandments must be seen not as a heavy burden, but as the only means to a full and abundant life. As God's children confidently lived in faith, hope, and love, Jesus' victory would increasingly become theirs.



The traditional site of the tomb of the apostle John is in the ruins of this ancient church in Ephesus.

7. *How, and why, can believers express the love of Christ, according to John?*

8. *In addition to benefiting others, what does love accomplish for the believer?*

9. *What else does John declare about the future of the believer, and why?*

Living in Perfect Love

Love gives, and God loved humanity so much, He gave His very best. He didn't think of Himself but gave us His most beloved gift—His only Son. Jesus was birthed to the world as a product of love. A well-known description of God's love is John 3:16: "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life."

Because we want to be like Jesus, we love others. We want to love others as God loves us, perfectly and sacrificially. According to 1 Corinthians 13, God's love is the greatest gift of all to us. Love never gives up. Love cares more for others than it does for itself. Love is not prideful and always looks for the best in others. The apostle Paul explained that God's love is the motive for everything we do, or what we do really amounts to nothing in His eyes. If you give all your belongings to the poor and it's not driven by love, your giving is unprofitable. Finally, if you suffer until death for a worthy cause, but not for the sake of love, your great sacrifice is useless.

The apostle John said it is a simple equation: if you live in love, God lives in you. It's through Him and His Spirit that we love others. We do not naturally love others because unlike God, we're selfish and self-centered. In everyday lives, our needs and wants come first. When those are satisfied, then we might think of other people.

So how do we love like Jesus? Sometimes it's what we don't do that makes the difference. As Paul said, it's not doing things "out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others" (Phil. 2:3-4). That's what Jesus did. That's what we should do.

10. *Describe what perfect love looks like.*

11. *What signs do you see that you are living in His perfect love now?*

12. *If you gave examples of how hard loving like Jesus can be, what would you say?*

Love: Your Dwelling Place

Everyone needs a dwelling place. Everyone needs a place they can call home. When we love like God, we dwell in love. Love becomes the structure and foundation for our lives, and it becomes hard to do anything that is not done out of love. When we love like Jesus, love is our dwelling place.

► *Think of three people to spread some extra love to this next week such as a family member, a friend, and a stranger. Write a commitment here to do that:*

This week I will do these things that show love to others:

KEY VERSE

God is love; and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him. —1 John 4:16b, KJV

God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in them. —1 John 4:16b, NIV

DAILY BIBLE READINGS

Week of August 23 through August 29

(See *The Quiet Hour* for devotionals on these passages.)

- Mon.** 1 Corinthians 15:16-23—From Death to Life in Christ.
- Tues.** Ephesians 3:14-21—Strengthening the Inner Being.
- Wed.** Ecclesiastes 12:9-14—Every Deed, Good or Evil, Judges.
- Thurs.** Romans 2:4b-11—God’s Judgment of Human Behavior Impartial.
- Fri.** 2 Corinthians 4:1-6—Paul, Confident in the Ministry.
- Sat.** 2 Corinthians 4:7-15—Entering the Presence of Jesus.
- Sun.** 2 Corinthians 4:16—5:10—Live the Faith with Confidence.