

312 Overcoming the world

Just as with Christians today, the original Christian readers of the First Epistle of John lived in times of much spiritual and moral confusion, some of which confusion centred on the Personhood of Jesus Christ. False teachings were widespread, which, when all was said and done, tended to be variations on either of two errors: either Jesus was only a man, albeit with some impressive-looking divine-type qualities; or He was only God and was only “dressed up” as a man. If either of these beliefs was true, then the core Gospel belief that Jesus was and is the Christ, God-made-man, God-with-us, would be false. So there was much at stake.

Hence the Holy Spirit, through the apostle John, wrote to emphasise, first, that Jesus truly is the unique Son of God, and second, how we can be sure within our beings that this is really so. Throughout the Epistle there is a great emphasis on love: God’s love for us as expressed in and through His Son Jesus Christ; our love for God, by way of our response to Him, again in and through the Lord Jesus Christ; and, as what should be a natural consequence, our love for one another.

Towards the end of the Epistle these teachings are summed up in Chapter 5, a few verses of which we can take note of here in this season of Advent. “Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been generated from God” (5.1, J P Green Literal) – therein lies the heart of the Gospel, centred on the Lord Jesus, spelt out in all its beauty and clarity. Though this truth is probably very familiar to us, we do well in these troubled days to appreciate afresh its enormity! If you believe in yourself that Jesus really is Who He says He is, then that belief within you is proof that you have been regenerated by God the Father, or “born again” as Jesus put it in His conversation with Nicodemus (John 3.3-8). Hence all the blessings of that rebirth, 100% brought about by Almighty God our heavenly Father in His love for us, are yours, right here and now - and they always will be (eg., John 10.27-30 / Romans 5.1 & 8.15-17, 28-39 / Philippians 1.6 / II Timothy 1.12-13 / Hebrews 9.13-15).

Then we read, “And everyone loving the [one] generating” - that is, God the Father - “loves the [one] generated of him” – that is, each of our fellow Christians. The passage continues – “By this we know that we love the children of God: when we love God and practise His commandments” (5.2, Literal).

So we see in these words the one-ness of God the Father and God the Son in their co-equal divinity (with the Holy Spirit, though He is not mentioned here, eg., Titus 3.4-7); the blessings and consequences of our faith in Christ; and the central role of love between all who are involved in these relationships.

Our love for God in Christ, leading on to our love for one another, thus involves our obedience to God’s commandments (5.2-3a). “And his commandments are not heavy, because everything having been generated of God overcomes the world, and this is the victory overcoming the world, our faith. Who is the [one] overcoming the world except the [one] who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?” (5.3b-5, Literal).

This is quite a sequence! Our faith in “Jesus Christ as Lord” is the means by which we “overcome the world”; and in that overcoming, we find that the keeping of God’s

commandments – that is, our love for God in Christ and for one another – is not “heavy”, but instead, straightforward and increasingly natural.

By looking back into Chapter 4, we also learn from the Holy Spirit why and how we are to “test the spirits”: “By this know the Spirit of God: every spirit which confesses that Jesus Christ is come in [the] flesh is from God” – and vice-versa (4.1-3, Literal). And then comes the reassurance – “Little children, you are of God and have overcome them (the false spirits), because He in you is greater than he (the spirit of antichrist, v.3b) in the world” (v.4).

Satan and his false spirits very evidently remain active these days, in seeking to blot out the Person and Work of Jesus Christ wherever they can. But by God’s grace these, and all other, enemies of the living God are already overcome by the Lord Jesus Himself (John 16.33). Amazingly, this Christ-won overcoming continues in Christian folk like us, grounded in our God-given faith in Christ and in our obedience to “the two great commandments” of love.

So in response to the Father’s gift and with a well-founded “holy boldness”, we have every reason to join again with those joyful shepherds in making known the world-changing presence of “a Saviour, who is Christ the Lord”.

Truly – “Glory to God in the highest!” (Luke 2.17,11,14).

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