

A Conquering Faith

1 John 4:2-3, 13-17; 5:4-5

SS Lesson for 08/22/2021

Devotional Scripture: John 14:15-24

OUTLINE

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Background from the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary

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Commentary from the Bible Knowledge Commentary

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Born again through belief in Jesus (1 John 5:1)

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Belief that Jesus is the Christ, Son of the living God (Matt 16:15-16)

Belief that God exists and having faith in God (Heb 11:6)

Belief to have eternal life (John 3:15)

Belief that Jesus is God in the flesh (Col 2:9)

Belief in the resurrection (John 11:25-26)

Believe to receive the righteousness from God (Rom 3:22)

CONCLUSION AND OTHER THOUGHTS

COMMENTARY THOUGHTS FROM DR. THOMAS CONSTABLE

Lesson Background and Key Verse

Background from the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary

One topic given particular attention during studies at Bible colleges is that of the incarnation. That topic addresses the who, what, when, where, why, and how of the Son of God putting on flesh to become the person Jesus of Nazareth. Today's text is considered in such studies. Five of the books of the New Testament are attributed to the apostle John, one of the original 12 disciples (see Matthew 4:21-22; 10:1-4). His five books are the Gospel of John; the letters (also called epistles) that we designate as 1 John, 2 John, and 3 John; and the book of Revelation. History strongly associates John in his later years with the church in Ephesus. Tradition says he died in the AD 90s. His three letters were probably written in the region of Ephesus for churches in the area, and thus would date from the AD 80s or 90s. John would have been an elderly man at that time. The dignity of his age peeks through in 1 John, where he addressed his readers as his "dear children" numerous times. The idea of overcoming, or being victorious, is a favorite theme of John's. In 1 John 2:13-14 he discussed victory over Satan. In 1 John 4-5, he wrote about overcoming the pressures of the world. As we consider this in today's study, we must be careful to distinguish among three ways the Bible speaks of "the world":

- As planet Earth in its physical sense (examples: Acts 17:24; Romans 10:18)
- As the world's human inhabitants (examples: Luke 2:1; John 3:16)
- As a system of values opposed to God's (examples: John 14:17; Colossians 2:20)

In his first letter John wrote of Satan's system for opposing the work of God on earth (1 John 2:15-17). In this sense, a person of the world lives for the pleasures of the flesh, but a dedicated Christian lives for the joys of the Spirit. When John wrote his first epistle, Christianity had existed for more than 50 years. His audience faced the pressures of heretical ideas and uncertainty about their salvation. The ideas that would become full-blown gnosticism in the second century AD were already threatening Christianity. One of gnosticism's heretical beliefs was that salvation came through knowledge (Greek: *gnosis*, from which we have our word *diagnosis*). They also believed that Christ was a spirit who didn't exist in bodily form. The spiritual was viewed as always good, and the physical was viewed as always evil.

Key Verse: 1 John 4:16

And we have known and believed the love that God has for us. God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God in him.

Commentary from the Bible Knowledge Commentary

4:1-3. To begin with, **the Spirit of God** must be distinguished from false spirits. This is particularly necessary **because many false prophets have gone out into the world**. The touchstone by which these **spirits** (false prophets) are to be tested is their attitude toward the incarnate person of **Jesus Christ**. The failure to acknowledge (*homologeï*, "confess"; cf. 1:9; 2:23; 4:15) **that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh** is precisely what exposes **the spirit of the antichrist, which** John had already warned his readers about (2:18-27; cf. 2 John 7).

4:4-6. Up to now, the writer assured his **dear children** (*teknia*; cf. 2:12), the readers, that they had **overcome** these antichrists. The readers had successfully resisted the antichrists (false prophets) by means of **the One who is in** them (no doubt another reference to the Spirit; cf. 3:24; 4:2). Reliance on God is the secret of all victory whether over heresy or any other snare. The indwelling One—the Holy Spirit who indwells every believer (3:24; 4:13; Rom. 8:9) and is thus "the One who is in you"—**is mightier than the one who is in the world**, namely, Satan (cf. 1 John 5:19). He is called "the prince of this world" (John 12:31); "the god of this Age" (2 Cor. 4:4); and "the ruler of the kingdom of the air" (Eph. 2:2). The antichrists **are from the world and... speak from the viewpoint of the world**. For this reason they get a good hearing from **the world**. It is always true that satanically inspired thought has a special appeal to worldly minds. But people who **are from God** (*ek tou theou*, "of God"; cf. 1 John 4:4, "from God"; v. 5, "from the world"; and 3:12, "belonged to the evil one") **listen to** the apostles. The pronouns which begin verses 4-6 (**You... They, and We**) are emphatic in the original and evidently mark off three groups: the

readers, the antichrists, and the apostles. Each one who can be described as “from God” (i.e., actuated and influenced by God) and thus **knows God listens to** the apostolic voice. In the history of the church, apostolic doctrine has always been the means by which **the Holy Spirit of truth and the spirit of falsehood** can be effectively distinguished. True Christianity is apostolic Christianity.

4:7-8. The writer now returned to the subject of **love** which, like faith in God’s Son (v. 13), is a product of the Spirit. As a confession of the incarnate person of Christ marks one off as being actuated by God (i.e., “from God”, vv. 4, 6) so does love, since **love comes from God**. Hence, one **who loves** (in the Christian sense of that term) **has been born of God** (cf. 2:29; 3:9; 5:1, 4, 18) **and he knows God**. Love stems from a regenerate nature and also from fellowship with God which issues in knowing Him (see 2:3-5). The absence of **love** is evidence that a person **does not know God**. Significantly, John did not say such a person is not born of God. In the negative statement only the last part of the positive one (in 4:7) is repeated. Since **God is love**, intimate acquaintance with Him will produce love. Like light (1:5), love is intrinsic to the character and nature of God, and one who is intimately acquainted with God walks in His light (1:7).

4:9-11. If one wishes to know **how God** has demonstrated **His love**, he need only look at the fact that God **sent His One and only Son into the world that we might** obtain eternal life thereby (“One and only” translates *monogenē*, “only born one,” which also is used in John 1:14, 18; 3:16.) Moreover, this **love** was **not** a response to man’s **love**, but an initiative on God’s part (1 John 4:10). By it the **Son** became an **atonement Sacrifice** (*hilasmon*, “propitiation”; see 2:2) **for our sins**. Nothing less than God’s love in Christ is the model for the **love** Christians should have toward **one another**. Important to John’s argument is his reference to God’s love in 4:9 as His love **among us**. In verses 12-16 he showed how this love, experienced among Christians, can make God visible to them.

4:12-13. In His divine nature and essence, **God** has never been **seen** by any living man (cf. John’s similar statement, John 1:18). Yet in the experience of mutual **love** among believers, this invisible **God** actually **lives in us and His love is made complete in us**. The term “lives” once again renders John’s characteristic word (*menō*) for the abiding life. As in 1 John 2:5, the idea of God’s love reaching completeness in a believer may suggest a deep and full experience of that love (cf. 4:17). The statement in verse 13 is intimately related to the ideas just expressed. **We know that we live** (*menomen*, “we abide”) **in Him and He in us, because He has given us of His Spirit**. The mutual abiding of a believer in God and God in that believer (cf. John 15:4-7) is indicated by that believer’s experience of the Spirit. The Greek for “of His Spirit” (*ek tou pneumatos*) suggests participation in the Spirit of God, literally, “He has given us *out of* His Spirit.” The same construction occurs in 1 John 3:24. When a believer loves, he is drawing that love from God’s Spirit (cf. Rom. 5:5), who is also the Source of his confession of Christ (1 John 4:2). Thus both the faith and the love enjoined in the dual “command” of 3:23 are products of the Spirit’s operation in a believer. A believer’s Spirit-led obedience becomes the evidence that he is enjoying the mutual abiding relationship with God that John wrote about.

4:14. The apostle now reached a climactic point in his argument. He had just written that “if we love each other,” then the God whom no one has seen abides “in us and His love is made complete in us.” The result of this experience is that **we have seen and testify that the Father has sent His Son to be the Savior of the world**. Since the first person plural in verses 7-13 is clearly meant to include the readers, the “we” of this verse includes them as well. The indwelling God, whose presence is manifested in the midst of a loving Christian community, thus becomes in a sense truly visible to the eye of faith. Though no one “has seen” (*tetheatai*, “beheld”) God (v. 12), believers who abide in Him (v. 13) “have seen” (*tetheametha*, “behold”) the Son as He is manifested among loving Christians. Christians who behold this manifestation have in fact “seen” and can “testify” to the fundamental truth that “the Father has sent the Son to be the Savior of the world.” This great truth can be put on display through the instrumentality of Christian love. With these words, John reached the goal he had announced in the prologue (1:1-4), namely, that his readers might share the apostles’ experience. The apostles had “seen” (*heōrakamen*) the “life which was with the Father and... appeared to us” (1:2). In a loving Christian community, the believers can see that too. The term “Life” in 1:2, though it refers to Christ incarnate, nevertheless was carefully chosen by the writer. What his readers could witness is the renewed manifestation of that Life in their fellow Christians. But, as he had argued ever since 2:29, the “life” which Christians possess by new birth is inherently sinless and can only be manifested through righteousness and Christlike love. But when that occurs, Christ whom the apostles saw in the flesh is, in a real but spiritual sense, “seen” again (4:14).

4:15-16. Under the circumstances just described, confession (cf. 1:9; 2:23; 4:3) **that Jesus is the Son of God** is a sign that the confessor enjoys a mutual abiding relationship with **God**. The section is rounded off by the assertion, **We know and rely on** (lit., “have come to believe”) **the love God has for us**. Living in

the atmosphere of mutual Christian love produces a personal knowledge of God's love and fresh experience of faith in that love. Since **God is love** (cf. v. 8), one who **lives in love lives** (*menei*, "abides") **in God** and has **God** abiding with **him**. The last part of verse 16 ought to be taken as the conclusion of the paragraph, rather than the start of a new one. John again affirmed the reality of the abiding experience enjoyed by all Christians who love.

4:17. This verse might be rendered, literally, "In this respect love **is** made complete with **us**, namely, **that we** should have boldness in **the Day of Judgment.**" The writer was not referring here to a final judgment in which the eternal destiny of each believer hangs in balance. There is no such **judgment** for a believer (John 5:24). But a believer's life will be assessed at the judgment seat of Christ (1 Cor. 3:12-15; 2 Cor. 5:10). Yet even on that solemn occasion, a believer may **have confidence** (*parrēisian*; cf. 1 John 2:28; 3:21; 5:14) that God will approve the quality of his life if, through **love**, that believer while **in this world** becomes **like Him**. An unloving Christian is *unlike* his Lord and may anticipate rebuke and loss of reward at the judgment seat. But a loving believer is one in whom the work of God's love has been **made complete** (cf. the same words in 2:5; 4:12), and the fruit of that is boldness before the One who will judge him. In this way he achieves the goal of confidence and no shame before Him, expressed in 2:28.

4:18-19. If a believer looks forward with trepidation to the judgment seat of Christ, it is because God's **love** has not yet reached completeness in Him. The words here rendered **perfect** are no different in force from the idea of "completeness" expressed in 2:5 and 4:12. The matured experience of God's **love** (reached in the act of loving one another) is incompatible with **fear** and expels **fear** from the heart. The words **fear has to do with punishment** are literally, "fear has punishment." Fear carries with it a kind of torment that is its own punishment. Ironically, an unloving believer experiences punishment precisely because he feels guilty and is afraid to meet his Judge. Such fear prohibits a completed love (one **who fears is not made perfect in love**). But a Christian who loves has nothing to fear and thus escapes the inner torment which a failure to love can bring. Nevertheless a believers' love is essentially derivative. **We love** (the majority of mss. add "Him") **because He first loved us**. A believer who loves other believers also loves God, and in facing his Judge he is simply facing One whom he loves. There is no fear in such an experience; yet he recognizes that his love for God originated in God's love for him.

4:20-21. **Anyone** who claims to **love God, yet hates his brother** makes a false claim: **he is a liar**. John often pointed up false claims by using the word "liar": 1:10; 2:4, 22; 4:20; 5:10 (cf. "lie" in 1:6). **Love** for the unseen **God** (cf. 4:12) can only be concretely expressed by **love** for one's visible Christian **brother**. Furthermore, God's **command** (v. 21; cf. 2:3; 3:23-24; 5:3) has joined together the two kinds of **love**—love for **God** and love for one's **brother**.

5:1-3a. If one asks who his Christian brother or sister is, the answer is that **everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God** (cf. "born of God" in 3:9; 4:7; 5:4, 18). Whether or not a believer exhibits an admirable life, he should be an object of his fellow Christian's love. This love does not spring from something lovable in the person himself, but from his paternity, since **everyone who loves the Father loves His child as well**. Moreover, **love** for God's **children** is not mere sentiment or verbal expression (cf. 3:18), but is inseparable from **loving God and obeying His commands** (5:2; cf. 2:3; 3:22, 24; 5:3). If a further question is asked about what it means to **love... God**, the answer is, **to obey His commands**. Thus the apostle, by this series of statements, reduces love for God and one's fellow Christians to its fundamental character. A person who obeys God's commands is doing what is right, both toward God and toward his fellow believers and is thus loving both God and them. But it must be remembered that this includes the willingness to sacrifice for one's brother (cf. 3:16-17).

5:3b-5. As a matter of fact, God's **commands are not burdensome** (cf. Matt. 11:30). This is because the principle of victory resides in **everyone born of God**. Every such person **has** already **overcome the world** (cf. 1 John 4:4). His **faith** in Christ, by which he was regenerated, constitutes a victory over the world system which is satanically blinded to the gospel (cf. 2 Cor. 4:3-4). **Who is it then that overcomes the world? Only he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God**. With these words, the writer affirmed that a believer is a world-conqueror by means of his faith in Christ. This suggests that such faith is the secret of his continuing victory and, for that reason, obedience to God's commands need not be burdensome.

Major Theme Analysis

(Scriptural Text from the New King James Version; cross-references from the NIV)

Conquering by Recognizing the Spirit of God (1 John 4:2-3)

2 By this you know the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is of God, 3 and every spirit that does not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is not of God. And this is the spirit of the Antichrist, which you have heard was coming, and is now already in the world.

Recognizing through confession (2)

Confession that is founded on the retained and lived word of God (Luke 8:15)

15 But the seed on good soil stands for those with a noble and good heart, who hear the word, retain it, and by persevering produce a crop.

Confession that accompanies obedience to God (2 Cor 9:13)

13 Because of the service by which you have proved yourselves, men will praise God for the obedience that accompanies your confession of the gospel of Christ, and for your generosity in sharing with them and with everyone else.

Confession of eternal life (1 Tim 6:12)

12 Fight the good fight of the faith. Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called when you made your good confession in the presence of many witnesses.

Confession that is more than empty words (Luke 6:46)

46 "Why do you call me, 'Lord, Lord,' and do not do what I say?"

Recognizing the antichrist (3)

Antichrist who is the lawless one (2 Thess 2:3-8)

3 Don't let anyone deceive you in any way, for that day will not come until the rebellion occurs and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the man doomed to destruction. 4 He will oppose and will exalt himself over everything that is called God or is worshiped, so that he sets himself up in God's temple, proclaiming himself to be God. 5 Don't you remember that when I was with you I used to tell you these things? 6 And now you know what is holding him back, so that he may be revealed at the proper time. 7 For the secret power of lawlessness is already at work; but the one who now holds it back will continue to do so till he is taken out of the way. 8 And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord Jesus will overthrow with the breath of his mouth and destroy by the splendor of his coming.

Antichrist who comes in the last hour (1 John 2:18)

18 Dear children, this is the last hour; and as you have heard that the antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have come. This is how we know it is the last hour.

Antichrist who denies that Jesus is the Christ (1 John 2:22)

22 Who is the liar? It is the man who denies that Jesus is the Christ. Such a man is the antichrist — he denies the Father and the Son.

Antichrist who is the deceiver (2 John 7)

7 Many deceivers, who do not acknowledge Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh, have gone out into the world. Any such person is the deceiver and the antichrist.

Conquering by Abiding in God (1 John 4:13-17)

13 By this we know that we abide in Him, and He in us, because He has given us of His Spirit.

14 And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent the Son as Savior of the world.

15 Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God.

16 And we have known and believed the love that God has for us. God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God in him.

17 Love has been perfected among us in this: that we may have boldness in the Day of Judgment; because as He is, so are we in this world.

Abiding through the Holy Spirit (13)

Abiding means that we are God's temple (1 Cor 6:19)

19 Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own;

Abiding means we have the power to obey God (Ezek 36:27)

27 And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws.

Abiding means we have spiritual life (Rom 8:11)

11 And if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit, who lives in you.

Abiding means the Holy Spirit guides us in truth (John 16:13)

13 But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come.

Abiding means the Holy Spirit teaches us how to live (Gal 5:16)

16 So I say, live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature.

Abiding through faith in Jesus (14-15)

Abiding in faith results in nothing being impossible (Matt 17:20)

20 He replied, "Because you have so little faith. I tell you the truth, if you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there' and it will move. Nothing will be impossible for you."

Abiding in faith provides answered prayers (Matt 21:21-22)

21 Jesus replied, "I tell you the truth, if you have faith and do not doubt, not only can you do what was done to the fig tree, but also you can say to this mountain, 'Go, throw yourself into the sea,' and it will be done. 22 If you believe, you will receive whatever you ask for in prayer."

Abiding in faith results in justification (Rom 3:28)

28 For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from observing the law.

Abiding in faith is a way of life for the Christian (2 Cor 5:7)

7 We live by faith, not by sight.

Abiding in faith pleases God (Heb 11:6)

6 And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.

Abiding through love (16-17)

Abiding in love because of being God's disciple (John 13:35)

25 Leaning back against Jesus, he asked him, "Lord, who is it?"

Abiding in love because of being kept in God's love (John 15:10)

10 If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have obeyed my Father's commands and remain in his love.

Abiding in love from the hope stored up for us in Heaven (Col 1:4-5)

4 because we have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love you have for all the saints— 5 the faith and love that spring from the hope that is stored up for you in heaven and that you have already heard about in the word of truth, the gospel

Abiding in love because of being born again (1 Peter 1:22-23)

22 Now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth so that you have sincere love for your brothers, love one another deeply, from the heart. 23 For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God.

Abiding in love because of God's calling to inherit a blessing (1 Peter 3:8-9)

8 Finally, all of you, live in harmony with one another; be sympathetic, love as brothers, be compassionate and humble. 9 Do not repay evil with evil or insult with insult, but with blessing, because to this you were called so that you may inherit a blessing.

Conquering by Overcoming the World (1 John 5:4-5)

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?

Overcoming through being born again (4)

Born again to enter into the kingdom of God (John 3:5)

5 Jesus answered, "I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit.

Born again through the Word (James 1:18)

18 He chose to give us birth through the word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of all he created.

Born again through the power of God, not man (John 1:12-13)

12 Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God—13 children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God.

Born again to see the kingdom of God (John 3:3)

3 In reply Jesus declared, "I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again."

Born again through belief in Jesus (1 John 5:1)

1 Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God, and everyone who loves the father loves his child as well.

Overcoming through belief in Jesus (5)

Belief that Jesus is the Christ, Son of the living God (Matt 16:15-16)

15 "But what about you?" he asked. "Who do you say I am?" 16 Simon Peter answered, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."

Belief that God exists and having faith in God (Heb 11:6)

6 And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.

Belief to have eternal life (John 3:15)

15 that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life.

Belief that Jesus is God in the flesh (Col 2:9)

9 For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form,

Belief in the resurrection (John 11:25-26)

25 Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; 26 and whoever lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?"

Believe to receive the righteousness from God (Rom 3:22)

22 This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference,

Conclusion and Other Thoughts

Commentary Thoughts from Dr. Thomas Constable

Verses 1-3

John wrote, "Stop believing." Evidently some of his first readers were believing false teaching. "Credulity means gullibility and some believers fall easy victims to the latest fads in spiritualistic humbuggery." [Note: Robertson, 6:229.]

It is necessary to distinguish the Spirit of God from false spirits (i.e., spirits advocating falsehood) because many false prophets have gone out into the world. False spirits (utterances or persons inspired by a spirit opposed to Christ) produce false teaching. "To 'test the spirits' is to make a choice from among competing claims." [Note: Yarbrough, p. 192.]

John's test question whereby one can determine whether the Spirit of God or a spirit of falsehood possesses a person was this. What does the person believe about Jesus Christ? If a person denies the incarnation of Jesus Christ—a heresy false teachers were promoting among John's original readers—he has the spirit of antichrist (cf. 1 John 2:18-27). That is, a denial of the doctrine of Christ as the apostles taught it, deviation from orthodox Christology, evidences a spirit opposed to Jesus Christ. "The test of the presence of the Divine Spirit is the confession of the Incarnation, or, more exactly, of the Incarnate Saviour. The Gospel centres in a Person and not in any truth, even the greatest, about the Person." [Note: Westcott, p. 140.]

Notice that John did not say we can tell false spirits by their works. He said we can identify that they are false spirits by their message. This was the acid test of a false prophet under the Old Covenant as well (Deuteronomy 13:1-5). "According to the Lord Jesus, false prophets were to be tested 'by their fruits' (cf. Matthew 7:16-20). Contrary to popular interpretation, this does not mean that they were to be tested by their works. On the contrary, as Matthew 12:33-37 proves, their fruits are their words! Indeed, as the Lord Himself said, they 'come to you in sheep's clothing' so that they look like sheep when in reality they are 'ravenous wolves' (Matthew 7:15). Their behavior does not set them apart from the sheep, but their message does!" [Note: Hodges, The Epistles . . ., p. 176.]

John did not say that every spirit that denies Jesus, but every spirit that does not confess Jesus (1 John 4:3). Often heretical teaching masks its deviations from the truth by simply failing to affirm important biblical truth. Rather than proclaiming, "Jesus is not the Christ," they fail to affirm that He is the Christ.

Verse 12

No one has seen God in His pure essence without some kind of filter (cf. John 1:18). Instances in which the biblical writers said that people saw God were theophanies, manifestations of God in human or angelic form (e.g., Genesis 18:1-22; Exodus 33:18-23; et al.). [Note: See Baker's Dictionary of Theology, s.v. "Theophany," by Wick Broomall.] Whenever we love one another we make it possible for God to "abide" in close fellowship with us. Furthermore God's love reaches a fullness and depth in us that is possible only when we love one another. It attains its full flower (1 John 4:19). There are three stages of God's love in 1 John. These stages are love manifested to the world (1 John 4:9), love given to the family of God (1 John 3:1), and love perfected in a smaller group within this family (i.e., those who abide in God, 1 John 4:12). The love of God does not reach perfection until it finds objects of love beyond itself. When it does, God, whom no one has seen, will be visible in this manifestation of love. "God's love for us is perfected only when it is reproduced in us or (as it may mean) 'among us' in the Christian fellowship." [Note: Stott, p. 164. Cf. Westcott, p. 152.]

The same phenomenon occurs in human families. When a child says or does something just like one of his or her parents, we see the parent in the child's behavior (cf. 1 John 3:9). "The love of God displayed in His people is the strongest apologetic that God has in the world." [Note: Bruce, p. 109.]

Verse 13

A believer's abiding in God and God's abiding in him or her become evident by the demonstration of love that comes "of" (lit. "out of") God's Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the source of the abiding believer's love just as He is the source of our obedience (cf. 1 John 3:23-24).

Verse 14

God's presence is observable in the midst of Christians who love each other. God produces that love. Most of John's readers had not, and all of us have not, seen Jesus Christ in the flesh as the apostles did. However, we can see God too and can bear witness with the apostles that God sent Jesus Christ into the world. We can share the apostles' experience that John said was his goal in writing this epistle (1 John 1:3-4). We can see God both in the manifestation of His love and in God's life behind that love as we observe Christians loving one another. This verse then is a high point in John's argument. This is the only place in John's epistles where he used the term "savior." It also appears only once in his Gospel (John 4:42). The Church has no more effective way to testify to the world about the Saviorhood of Jesus than by the re-display of the Savior's love in the fellowship of His disciples." [Note: Hodges, *The Epistles . . .*, p. 192.]

Verse 15

Confessing that Jesus is God's Son is not the only condition for abiding in God. It is one evidence that one is abiding. One not abiding may or may not make this confession. Confession is the last step, the step of bearing witness (cf. 1 John 1:9; 1 John 2:23; 1 John 4:3; Romans 10:9-10). "The notion of God 'abiding' in someone has rich associations with John's Gospel, where *meno* occurs more than three dozen times. The word can mean simply to dwell somewhere; one's domicile is where one 'abides' (John 1:38-39 a; John 2:12; John 4:40 [2x]; John 7:9; John 8:35 [2x]; John 10:40; John 11:6; John 11:54). But there is a fuller sense. God's Spirit descended and 'remained' on Jesus, according to John the Baptist (John 1:32-33). The Spirit was Jesus's constant companion. To 'remain' or 'abide' in Jesus's teaching is to be his true disciple (John 8:31). A disciple will be informed and steered by all that Jesus commanded and taught. God the Father 'remained' or 'abode' with Jesus during his earthly days (John 14:10). The Father was the source of the very words he spoke, and Jesus 'remained' continually in the Father's love (John 15:10 b. 'Abiding' describes a reality involving father, Son, and Spirit." [Note: Yarbrough, p. 252.]

Verse 16

This verse summarizes this section (1 John 3:24 to 1 John 4:16; cf. John 6:69). John was speaking of intimate knowledge ("come to know") and intimate fellowship ("abides"). "We" includes the readers with the apostles.

"For us" should be "among us," as in 1 John 4:9. "No body of believers will really be any stronger than the extent to which they manifest God's love by loving one another." [Note: Hodges, The Epistles . . . , p. 197.]

"The stages in John's thought at this point have now emerged clearly. Faith (acknowledging Jesus as God's Son, 1 John 4:15; and trusting in the love which God has for us, 1 John 4:16 a) leads to mutual indwelling between God and the believer. Such a personal relationship is consequently expressed in and perpetuated by 'living in love' (1 John 4:16 b). The believer's love, for God and for other people (or for God in other people, cf. 1 John 4:12), is to be active and sustained." [Note: Smalley, p. 256.]

John's point was that his readers had seen God in a sense similar to the sense in which the apostles had seen Him. The apostles had seen God in that they had seen Him in His Son, Jesus Christ. God had revealed His love to the apostles through Jesus Christ. The readers had seen God in that they had seen Him in His Spirit-indwelt abiding believers who loved one another. Consequently John's readers could bear witness to the truth as the apostles did, and they could enjoy the same intimate fellowship with God that the apostles did. "Too much 'witnessing' today is a mere mouthing of words. People need an expression of love." [Note: Wiersbe, p. 520.]

Verse 17

Our love becomes complete in the sense that we can now have confidence as we anticipate our day of judgment (i.e., the evaluation of our works at Christ's judgment seat; 1 Corinthians 3:12-15; 2 Corinthians 5:10; Romans 14:10-12). The characteristic of God and Christians in view here is our love. We do not need to fear the judgment seat of Christ if we have demonstrated love to others. By loving we become like Jesus Christ our Judge. Therefore to give love is to gain boldness (confidence). Here John said God's love reaches perfection "with us" (Gr. *meth hamon*) whereas in 1 John 4:12 he wrote that His love reaches perfection "in us" (Gr. *en hamin*). When it reaches perfection in us, a proper relationship to other people exists, namely, no hate. When it reaches perfection with us, a proper relationship to God exists, namely, no fear. As Jesus abode in His Father and consequently had confidence in the face of trials and death, so we can abide in Christ and have confidence in spite of the world's hostility. Abiding in God gave Jesus confidence, and it gives us confidence too.

Verse 5:4

Every Christian has overcome the world by his or her initial faith in Jesus Christ. To continue to overcome and obey God all we need to do is continue to exercise faith in God (cf. Romans 8:37; 1 Corinthians 15:57). "It is striking that John does not say 'whoever' but 'whatever' (Greek: *to gegennemenon*, neuter gender). This suggests that there is something inherently world-conquering in the very experience of being born of God. We are now immediately told what this is: 'and this is the victory that has overcome the world-our faith.'" [Note: Hodges, The Epistles . . . , p. 216.]

Verse 5:5

Continuing to overcome is not automatic for the Christian. Not all Christians continue to overcome the world (cf. 2 Timothy 4:10). Only those who continue to live by faith (i.e., trust and obey God) do. However, no one can overcome the world unless he or she believes that Jesus is the Son of God. It is in this sense that John refers to overcomers here; every Christian overcomes essentially because we believe in Jesus Christ.

(Adapted from URL: <https://www.studylight.org/commentaries/eng/dcc/1-john-4.html>)

Concluding Thoughts from the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary

We can have victory and overcome the world only through faith in Jesus Christ, the Son of God. We can overcome as we allow the Holy Spirit, sent after Jesus' ascension, to empower us to do so. God put this plan into action even though those created in his image rejected him time after time (John 1:10-11; 3:16). Despite this rejection, God still seeks to save people from a fate of eternal death (2 Peter 3:9). God's plan for this still centers on the life, death, resurrection, and ascension of his beloved Son, Jesus. The plan remains the same today as in the first century AD; it has not changed. In his life, Jesus proved his identity; in his death, Jesus paid the penalty for sin; in his resurrection, Jesus defeated the power of death; in his ascension, he reigns forevermore. At his second coming, Jesus will rid the world of sin and welcome his children home. Hallelujah! What a Savior we have! Those facts allow us to have confidence as we face the challenges of the world. And as we obey Jesus, we can assist others to do so as well.

Concluding Thoughts from the Echoes Commentary

A False Teaching - When the apostle John wrote the letter we call 1 John, specific ideas from Greek philosophy influenced the Christian church. One teaching was that flesh is evil, but spirit is eternal. Therefore, Jesus could not have been both human and God at the same time. John said that anyone denying the Incarnation, that Jesus came in the flesh, was against Christ.

A True Teaching - God's children and the heavenly Father are connected and communicate with one another. This is possible because God dwells within the believer through the Holy Spirit. Jesus' followers, His apostles, were eyewitnesses to the facts concerning Jesus. They testified concerning His actions while on earth. God and His love dwell in those who place their faith in Christ. Those in Christ's Body are overcomers through the power of the Holy Spirit. Believers do not have to worry about being defeated by the world. The victory has already been accomplished. Christ and His love dwelling in believers are benefits given to Christians. It's their grounding, their confidence. When days of darkness and judgment come, we do not have to push back but be bold in our beliefs.