

Assured By Grace

1 John 5.5-13; Ephesians 2.8-9

1 John 5.5-13

Who is the one who overcomes the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God? This is the One who came by water and blood, Jesus Christ; not with the water only, but with the water and with the blood. It is the Spirit who testifies, because the Spirit is the truth. For there are three that testify: the Spirit and the water and the blood; and the three are in agreement. If we receive the testimony of men, the testimony of God is greater; for the testimony of God is this, that He has testified concerning His Son. The one who believes in the Son of God has the testimony in himself; the one who does not believe God has made Him a liar, because he has not believed in the testimony that God has given concerning His Son. And the testimony is this, that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. He who has the Son has the life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have the life. These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may know that you have eternal life.

Ephesians 2.8-9

For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast.

For the last eight weeks we've been addressing the growing opposition to God, the truth of His Word, and Christians in America and around the world. We've addressed how we should live in the face of coming persecution.

Because of this, some may wrongly think that persecution is the greatest threat we face today – that we should pray for God to cause our leaders to repent of their godless policies, and restore the freedoms of religion and conscience we have historically enjoyed. Then the church will grow strong once again. *Not to burst your bubble, but the opposite is true.*

Always, throughout the entire 2000 years of church history, and continuing today, persecution causes the church to grow and Christians to become stronger in their faith. Over and over in the New Testament, Christians *rejoice* when they face trials and persecution. We are *encouraged* to suffer for Christ and follow His example.

But if ungodly leaders and bad laws aren't the greatest threat to the church in America, *what is?* I submit it is comfortable Christianity. We *think* we're strong because of our religious heritage and massive megachurches. We equate our wealth with strength, and pity poor Christians around the world.

A Christian leader from Liberia addressing American church leaders exposed our misplaced sense of spiritual health:

“[P]lease hear me when I say as graciously as I can: we Africans are not children in need of western enlightenment when it comes to the church's sexual ethics. We do not need to hear a progressive U.S. bishop lecture us about our need to 'grow up.' ...

“...some [American Christians] have the very faulty assumption that all Africans are concerned about is U.S.

financial support... I am sure, being sinners like all of you, some Africans are fixated on money.

“But with all due respect, a fixation on money seems more of an American problem than an African one. We get by on far less than most Americans do; we know how to do it... So if anyone is so naïve or condescending as to think we would sell our birthright in Jesus Christ for American dollars, then they simply do not know us. ...

“...not too long ago my country was ravaged by a terrible civil war... Then we faced the outbreak of the Ebola virus. We are keenly familiar with hardship and sorrow, but Jesus has led us through every trial...

“We will persevere in the race before us. We will remain steadfast and faithful. And someday we will wear the victor’s crown of glory with our King Jesus! Come walk with us!” (Dr. Jerry P. Kulah, dean at Gbarnga School of Theology at the United Methodist University in Liberia, at a recent United Methodist General Conference.)

Observers have been tracking for decades the growth of the church in Africa, Asia, and South America, compared with a precipitous decline in America. Chinese Christians consider persecution by their communist government as preparation for taking the gospel to Islamic nations in Central Asia.

Church historian Robert Godfrey says the greatest threat to the church in America today is *internal*, not *external*. “It’s not...the world we have to fear,” he writes; “It’s ourselves.” Instead of trusting in ourselves, where should we look?

In the passage we read this morning from 1 John, the apostle begins by posing a question: *Who is the one who overcomes the world?* He is writing to early Christians who are facing persecution, and tells them that *victory* in their Christian life comes through *believing in Jesus* (5b). The same Jesus who you believed in as Savior to receive eternal life is the One who you believe in to gain victory every day. God testified to Jesus being His Son in three ways: By water, by blood, and by the Spirit. Imagine a courtroom scene, with the Spirit testifying. Exhibit A is Jesus’ baptism, when the Spirit came and rested on Him and a voice from heaven said ‘This is My beloved Son.’ Exhibit B is Jesus’ crucifixion, after which He rose from the dead (6-10).

What John is doing is telling us *where we need to be looking if we want to experience victory in our Christian lives*. Here in America, we have grown comfortable. To be victorious in a time of persecution, we need to listen to the testimony of the Spirit about Jesus Christ.

1 John 5.11-13 stresses two truths in the Spirit’s testimony of Jesus to which we must hold fast in order to *overcome the world*. Let’s read those verses once again:

And the testimony is this, that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. He who has the Son has the life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have the life. These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may know that you have eternal life.

1. The Gospel of God's Grace

The first truth the Spirit wants us to take to heart is this: *A person who believes in Jesus has eternal life.* What we could never attain on our own, God has *given us in His Son.* The *gift of God is eternal life in Jesus Christ our Lord* (Rom. 6.23b). We read Eph. 2.8-9 earlier: *For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast.* God's gracious gift to anyone and everyone who believes in Jesus is eternal life. There is no 'fine print.' No additional requirements. No provisos. No *quid pro quo.* No question. Believe in Jesus, and you have eternal life.

This is the *gospel of God's grace* – the message of salvation that changes our 'eternal address' from hell to heaven, from eternal death to eternal life. One reason for the weakness of the church in America is confusion about this message.

If someone were to ask you, 'What must I do to be saved?' the answer today is the same as it was when the Philippian jailor asked Paul that question. In Acts 16.31 Paul answered: *Believe on the Lord Jesus and you will be saved.*

Why is knowing this gospel so important? Because if we get it wrong, we will stumble in times of spiritual battle. When Paul lists the armor of the Christian, he states that *our feet are to be shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace* (Eph. 6.15). Going into battle with the wrong footwear can be the difference between victory and defeat. As we face times of persecution, we need to be clear on the gospel: The person who believes in Jesus *has eternal life.*

Whether or not we grasp this first truth will determine if we get the second, which is this:

2. You Can Know You Have Eternal Life

If the first question the Spirit wants us to be clear on is *What must I do to be saved?* The second is this: Can I *know* I am saved eternally? Is so, *how?* How can I have *assurance* of my eternal life in heaven? Because the gospel is confused by many theologians and pastors today, millions of Christians live in constant doubt as to their salvation.

Gary Burge, professor at Wheaton College, wrote this: "I am frankly astonished at the number of times I have explained to classes of Christian college students about the unmerited love God has for us...and how in the course of my explanation students from strong evangelical churches literally will cry. . . .they point to the insecurity they have learned at their home churches. 'If I don't feel like God's child, maybe I'm not.' 'If I can't always act like God's child, perhaps I never was.' My office has witnessed such statements from the children of our evangelical households every semester for years." [*The Letters of John*, NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 155.]

In his book *The Quest for Full Assurance*, theologian Joel Beeke (pronounced "Beaky") writes: "...we are convinced that the doctrine of assurance is relevant precisely because we live in a day of minimal assurance. Sadly, the church, for the most part, is scarcely aware that it is crippled by a comparative absence of strong, full assurance." [Joel R. Beeke, *The Quest for Full Assurance* (Carlisle, Penn.: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1999), 279.]

The church has lost its way. 500 years ago, during the Reformation, Martin Luther and John Calvin stressed that when you believed in Jesus, you had assurance. *You believe in Jesus as your sin-bearer, and you're saved. Period.*

But in the centuries since, assurance has been replaced by endless doubts. A majority of Americans who say they are Christians today say that to get to heaven you must believe in Jesus and also live a good life. Well-known theologians and popular Christian pastors and authors also teach this.

As a result, many Christians have no assurance of salvation; they do not *know* that when they die they will go to heaven. Some churches teach that you can be sure you're saved *right now at this moment*, but you may commit some sin in the future and lose your salvation. Other churches teach that you can't lose your salvation, but if you commit some sin in the future it may show you were never saved in the first place. Either way, you can't know if you will go to heaven or hell.

But what does Scripture say? *These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may know that you have eternal life.* (1 John 5.13)

Conclusion

One thing you can count on: If the Spirit wants you to know the gospel, and to have assurance of your salvation, Satan wants *just the opposite*. Rev. 12.10 calls him 'the accuser of the brethren.' The great preacher H.A. Ironside put it this way: "These evil hosts (Satan and his demonic forces) are continually endeavoring, by deception, to keep Christians

from enjoying their present portion in Christ" [*Lectures on the Book of Revelation* (Neptune, New Jersey: Loizeaux Brothers, 1920), 214]. They lure us to sin, then accuse us of being not good enough to be loved by God, or saved.

Jesus called Satan 'the father of lies' (Jn. 8.44). He uses lies to confuse everyone. He confuses the unsaved by making them think they have to do good works to get to heaven, and millions who don't know Christ believe a false gospel today. 2 Cor. 4.3-4 explains how Satan deceives them: *And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing, in whose case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving so that they might not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.*

How does Satan confuse those who are saved? He makes them think they have to do good works to stay saved, or to prove they are saved. He steals their assurance of salvation from them. Millions of Christians are languishing in doubt, wondering if they'll get into heaven when they die.

Don't buy his lies. If you have been trying to do good works so you can get into heaven, hear the good news of the gospel right now: *Believe on the Lord Jesus and you will be saved.* If you have believed in Jesus but thought you couldn't know if you were going to heaven for sure, hear the good news of God's promise right now: *These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may know that you have eternal life.*

Hold on to these two truths, and you will overcome the world.