

Witnesses to the TRUTH



A Study of John's Letters

LESSON 8: 1 JOHN 5:1-12



INFORMATION FOR TEACHER

This section contains some great messages of hope. However, it also contains some confusing and ambiguous concepts, like “water and blood” (which has been interpreted many ways) and the Spirit, water, and blood testifying. While this lesson will pay brief attention to these concepts, it will attempt to use class time more wisely by focusing on the less ambiguous parts of the text. There is not time in one class period to examine all possible interpretations.

With that said, there is plenty here that is easier to understand, and your classes should find a great deal to think about and apply.



BIG IDEAS

- *We demonstrate our love for God by obeying him.*
- *We have God's testimony about Jesus in our heart.*
- *Those who believe in Jesus have life!*



DISCUSSION

- *Name a law (not necessarily Biblical) that you find difficult to follow.*



INTRODUCTION

John is at the beginning of the final part of his letter. In fact, most scholars believe that today's section (5:1-12 [and maybe including v. 13]) is the ending of the main body of the letter, with 5:13-14 and following serving as an epilogue.

The themes and ideas John mentions in his opening (1:1-4) are present in today's section: belief in Christ and obedience to the commands. It serves as a nice bookend for the letter.

The first section of today's text reminds us of the importance of obedience, and how it is *compatible* with love, not *contradictory* to it.

The second section reminds us that Jesus was a human who died a human death (i.e., by blood). It also reminds us that those who *believe* this testimony about Jesus have life.



THE BIBLICAL TEXT

I. 1 John 5:1-5

Read 1 John 5:1-5

We have already read repeatedly that proof of loving God is shown in how we love God's children. Now, John is going to state the reverse: proof that we love God's children is shown in how we love God (and keep God's commands).

John begins this section by writing what we have already read: 1) those who believe that Jesus is the Christ are born of God, and 2) people who love the father (God) must love his children (Jesus/fellow believers).

Now, John is going to reverse it: **How do we know** we love God's children (another "this is how we know statement)? By how we love God and carry out his commands (5:2). And to emphasize further, John tells us exactly how to love God: obey his commands (5:3).

Perhaps John is echoing part of his gospel, where Jesus tells his disciples, "If you love me, keep my commands" (John 14:15).

John links *obedience* and *love*. Again, love is not at all about a feeling but about action. Our obedient actions display our love for God. Sometimes we might think that obedience is boring, and that we only demonstrate our love for God by what we *say* to him in prayer and what we *sing* to him in song. But John reminds us that **love is shown in our obedience**.

John anticipates what must have been (and continues to be) a common objection: "It's *too hard* to keep God's commands!" John responds by telling/reminding his readers that God's commands are not burdensome.

At first glance, John seems to be sweeping this complaint under the rug, but if we read further, we find that John has justification for making that dismissal. Keeping God's commands is not burdensome because we are born of God, and therefore we have overcome the world (cf. Jn 16:33). Those who believe Jesus is the son of God have overcome the world (5:5). If we have overcome the world, how could we say that keeping God's commands is a burdensome task? We are victorious through Christ!

Culpepper puts it like this:

Genuine faith is therefore validated by love, which is ultimately victorious, by testimony to the saving significance of Jesus' death, and by life lived in fellowship with other believers and with God. Eternal life is the fulfillment of God's own being, God's love for us, and God's redemptive work. Faith, therefore, is self-authenticating, but only for believers because these are truths the world cannot grasp.⁸

- ***How does John relate obedience and love?***
- ***Are God's commands burdensome? Name a few that feel like it***
- ***How are we enabled to overcome the world?***

II. 1 John 5:6-12

Now John moves into some interesting territory. In verses 7, he affirms that Jesus came by water *and* blood – not by water only. What does this mean? Although there are various possibilities, the most common conclusion is that John is affirming Jesus' *ministry* (which was inaugurated by his baptism [water]) *and* Jesus' *death* (blood).

Remember, those who had left were questioning the humanity of Jesus. So John is reminding his readers that Jesus died a fleshly death. There was *blood!* And this *human* death was the thing that saved believers (see 1 John 1:7 and 2:2). Those who denied the human death of Jesus were denying the salvation it provided.

John brings in the Spirit as a witness – the same Spirit given to believers (1 John 3:24ff). Together with the water and blood, the Spirit testifies to the humanity and the saving effect of Jesus and his death.

In verse 9, John goes on to talk about our testimony (that which we have heard from the beginning [1 John 1:1]). Though the testimony of humans is not always wrong, we always accept God's testimony first. And those of us who believe in the Son of God have this same testimony in *our own* hearts.

⁸ R. Alan Culpepper, *The Gospel and Letters of John*, Interpreting Biblical Texts (Nashville: Abingdon, 1998), 272-273

If you *don't* believe that Jesus is the Son of God, you're calling God a liar, since God himself has testified that Jesus is his son (5:10).

John ends the section on notes of *hope* and *warning*: hope that if we believe this testimony, we have eternal life, and warning that if we *don't* believe the testimony (and thus, do not have the Son of God), we do *not* have life.

Notice that John speaks of eternal life as something that has already begun: "God *has given* us eternal life" and those who don't have the Son "do not (not will not) have life." We might be reminded of Jesus' statement about his sheep: "I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full" (John 10:10).

- ***Why does John need to remind his readers about the water and the blood?***
- ***How has God "testified" about Jesus being his son?***
- ***What "testimony" do we have in our heart (1 Jn. 5:10)?***
- ***What are some reasons people do not believe God's testimony?***



PUTTING SCRIPTURE TO WORK

- ***Knowing that we have God's testimony about Jesus in our heart, how might we live differently?***
- ***What are some ways in which we might share God's love from this chapter?***



FOR NEXT WEEK

Read 1 John 5:13-21.