

## 18. Learning to be Overcomers

In our last topic, we saw that one of our goals as Christians should be to help our physical and spiritual children learn to abide in the love of Christ and defeat the fear that is in their lives. As we help our physical and spiritual children learn to abide in Christ and defeat the fear that is in their lives, we also want to help them learn how to experience victory over all that is a part of the world in their lives. Believers do not need to live lives of defeat as Christians. Instead, Christ wants us to understand that He has already overcome the world and because we have placed our faith in Him, we are also overcomers. That will be the focus of our topic today.

Many Christians live lives of defeat. That is not the plan of Christ for Christians. Instead, Christ wants us to understand that we are overcomers and what it means to be overcomers. We also want to help our physical and spiritual children understand what it means to be overcomers. In 1 John 5:4, we read, “For whatever is born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world--our faith.” Every Christian is an overcomer, because 1 John 5:4 says that overcomers are born of God and Galatians 2:20 says that Christ lives in us.

It is this relationship we have with Christ, because we are in Christ and He is in us, that makes us overcomers. In John 16:33, Christ said, “These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.” Christ has overcome the world and because Christ dwells in our life that means we have also overcome the world if we have placed our trust in Christ. This is what makes it possible for a Christian to experience a life of more and more victory as we grow in Christ.

In John 3:1-8, Christ explained the difference between physical birth and spiritual birth to Nicodemus. Verse eight says, “The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear the sound of it, but cannot tell where it comes from and where it goes. So is everyone who is born of the Spirit.” Christ summarized His explanation of spiritual birth by saying that everyone who experiences spiritual birth has been born of God. In the first few verses of 1 John 5, we see three characteristics of an overcomer. 1 John 5:1 says, “Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God, and everyone who loves Him who begot also loves him who is begotten of Him.” In this verse, we see that the first characteristic of a person that is born of God is that they believe Jesus is the Christ.

Physical birth produces many changes when an infant comes out of the womb of the mother and begins a new life. In the same way, spiritual birth produces many changes when a person is born of God. In fact, 2 Corinthians 5:17 says, “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.” Here, we see that spiritual birth makes a person a new creation. The reason we become a new creation at the moment of spiritual birth is due to the fact that we became partakers of the divine nature at that moment. 2 Peter 1:4 says, “By which have been given to us exceedingly great and precious promises, that through these you may be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.” This is the reason that true belief will cause changes in the life of every new Christian. The divine nature gives us a desire to please God and do what is right in the sight

of God.

The second characteristic of a person that is born of God is given for us in 1 John 5:2, where we read, “By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and keep His commandments.” In addition to belief, this verse tells us that the second characteristic of a person that is born of God is that the person will love God and have a desire to keep His commandments. This desire to keep His commandments will start with a desire to keep the new commandment that Christ gave the night before He was crucified. John 13:34-35 says, “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.” As a result, a person that has been born of God will have a desire to love God and love other Christians.

In 1 John 5:3, we see the third characteristic of a person that is born of God. That verse says, “For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments. And His commandments are not burdensome.” Here, we see that a person that is born of God has a desire to be obedient and keep the commandments of the Lord. One of the things about the commandments of the Lord is that His commandments are not burdensome. This means that the commandments of the Lord are not like a heavy weight. In contrast, the rules of most religions are like heavy weights. Christ described the heavy weight of the rules of the Pharisees when He said, in Matthew 23:2-4, “The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat. Therefore whatever they tell you to observe, that observe and do, but do not do according to their works; for they say, and do not do. For they bind heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay them on men's shoulders; but they themselves will not move them with one of their fingers.” The heavy burdens that various religions place on others are often efforts to try to earn salvation through works.

Since our physical and spiritual children are already overcomers, if they have placed their trust in Christ, we want to show them how to experience the victory the Lord gave them when they placed their faith in Christ. Many times, new Christians have never been shown how to let the love of Christ guide and direct them in their daily lives. They do not practice obedience in daily living. They have been given the divine nature, but they have never grown enough to see that become a part of their daily life. That is why they need an example to follow.

In 1 Corinthians 3:1-3, we see that the Corinthian Christians had not grown properly. Those verses say, “And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual people but as to carnal, as to babes in Christ. I fed you with milk and not with solid food; for until now you were not able to receive it, and even now you are still not able; for you are still carnal. For where there are envy, strife, and divisions among you, are you not carnal and behaving like mere men?” Instead of practicing love and obedience in their lives, we see that the lives of the Corinthian Christians were filled with envy, strife and divisions. They were acting like people who were not Christians.

As a result, Paul explained the importance of spiritual parents to help new and struggling Christians in their spiritual growth. In 1 Corinthians 4:14-17, Paul wrote, “I do not write these things to shame you, but as my beloved children I warn you. For though you might have ten thousand instructors in Christ, yet you do not have many fathers; for in Christ Jesus I have begotten you

through the gospel. Therefore I urge you, imitate me. For this reason I have sent Timothy to you, who is my beloved and faithful son in the Lord, who will remind you of my ways in Christ, as I teach everywhere in every church.” Then, in 1 Corinthians 11:1, Paul said again, “Imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ.” Since Paul realized his responsibility to be a spiritual parent, in both passages Paul invited the struggling Corinthian Christians to follow his example. In the same way, we need to show our children how to be overcomers and experience victory in their lives by providing our own example for them to imitate.

One of the reasons why new and struggling Christians do not experience victory in their lives is that they are trying to live the Christian life in their own strength. That is why we need to help them understand that when they depend on their own strength to live the Christian life, Romans 7:18-19 says, “For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells; for to will is present with me, but how to perform what is good I do not find. For the good that I will to do, I do not do; but the evil I will not to do, that I practice.” We want to help our children understand that we cannot experience victory in our own strength.

In contrast, we want to help our children understand what happens as they learn to take root in Christ (Colossians 2:6-7) and the love of Christ (Ephesians 3:17-19). Romans 8:37-39 says, “Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.” Since the divine nature is love, at any time they are yielding to the Lord, the love of Christ will be flowing through their lives. That is why Romans 6:13-16 says, “And do not present your members as instruments of unrighteousness to sin, but present yourselves to God as being alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God. For sin shall not have dominion over you, for you are not under law but under grace. What then? Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace? Certainly not! Do you not know that to whom you present yourselves slaves to obey, you are that one's slaves whom you obey, whether of sin leading to death, or of obedience leading to righteousness?” As we show them, by our example, what it means to yield to Christ, they will experience victory in their lives.

All Christians have been given the divine nature so that they can be overcomers. New Christians need a godly example to imitate. They learn to imitate our lives as we follow Christ. Then, they will be shown by example how to apply James 1:22 in their lives. That verse says, “But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves.” As they learn to walk in love and obedience, they will experience great joy in their lives. May the Lord richly bless you as you give your physical and spiritual children an example to follow.