

SESSION 4
Sure of Victory



QUESTION 1:

What's your favorite comeback story?

THE POINT

Because Jesus has won the victory, His people are victorious.

THE PASSAGE

1 John 3:19-4:4

THE BIBLE MEETS LIFE

When I was a little boy, my uncles raised cattle. I can remember sitting on the tailgate of the old farm truck watching two of their bulls fighting. They seemed mismatched since one was a young bull and the other was old. The younger bull may have been quicker, but the older bull was bigger. After pawing the ground and throwing dirt in the air, the two bulls put their heads together and began to shove. Most of the time, the older bull won, but the younger bull would get the best of him on a few occasions.

When I look at the current condition of our world, I see a similar picture of righteousness fighting against wickedness. There is a constant shoving match between the two, and it's hard to tell who's winning. If you draw your information solely from the news media, then darkness seems to be winning. But when you read the Bible, you discover the opposite is true. Darkness may *seem* to be winning, but it has already been defeated. Jesus has won the victory, and His followers are on the winning side. We have the ultimate "comeback story" because of Jesus.

1 John 3:19-22

19 And hereby we know that we are of the truth, and shall assure our hearts before him.

20 For if our heart condemn us, God is greater than our heart, and knoweth all things.

21 Beloved, if our heart condemn us not, then have we confidence toward God.

22 And whatsoever we ask, we receive of him, because we keep his commandments, and do those things that are pleasing in his sight.

In the previous verses, John has been teaching on our responsibility to love one another. Love is proof of genuine salvation (1 John 3:14), which in turn assures our hearts before God. Sadly, we have times in our lives when we don't love as we should. When this happens, a sense of failure can set into our minds causing us to feel condemned before God, which in turn can fill us with doubt. Such doubt can be debilitating at times and can even render us unable to move forward.

Early in my Christian journey, I would feel condemned if I did not share the gospel with someone every day. The sense of shame and guilt became a burden to me, and I sometimes felt like I would drown in a bog of despondency. But thanks be to God, I soon realized God did not intend for me to be burdened with shame and guilt. Christ had carried all my guilt and shame, and they were nailed to the cross when Christ died for my sins.

Apparently, John's readers were also struggling with doubt. For this reason, John wrote to "assure our hearts before him. For if our heart condemn us, God is greater than our heart, and knoweth all things." Praise be unto God! He looks beyond our failures to the true intent of the heart. We can wrongly see ourselves through the lens of doubt, self-condemnation, or wrong thinking, but

God sees us through Christ's righteousness. Think about these beautiful words, "For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him" (2 Cor. 5:21). It is good news to know that, when we trust the finished work of Christ, "there is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus" (Rom. 8:1).

Because of Christ, we can walk in victory over doubt. This confidence allows us to pray with boldness in accordance with God's will (1 John 5:14). Think about it this way: When we abide faithfully in Christ, assurance blooms within us, which allows us to pray in faith according to God's will. Prayer, in this way, carries a promise: "Beloved, if our heart condemn us not, then have we confidence toward God. And whatsoever we ask, we receive of him, because we keep his commandments, and do those things that are pleasing in his sight."

Of course, the promise is conditional: "we keep his commandments." God takes great pleasure in answering prayers that are offered from an obedient heart. This is "pleasing in his sight."

Recently, one of my sons worked hard to raise money to purchase a used car. I was proud of him, so when he asked if I would pay the remaining amount for the car's purchase, I was glad to do so. Why? Because he had been diligent, worked hard, and done so well. He had respected my wishes and had done what I asked of him. Therefore, it pleased me to help him. He was not trying to perform for me; he simply wanted to please me. In the same way, God does not want us to perform for Him; He wants us to please Him. He wants our obedience to arise out of love for Him, not merely out of obligation.

QUESTION 2:

Why would our hearts need reassurance?

1 John 3:23-24

23 **And this is his commandment, That we should believe on the name of his Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, as he gave us commandment.**

24 **And he that keepeth his commandments dwelleth in him, and he in him. And hereby we know that he abideth in us, by the Spirit which he hath given us.**

At first glance, the two actions we are called to do sound like two commands from Christ: "believe" and "love." However, John referred to these as "his commandment" (singular). These two commands function together as one test for true Christianity. If we truly believe the right doctrine, then we will manifest the right ethic. We confirm the authenticity of our faith by obeying the singular commandment to believe Christ and love others, which in turn produces assurance of salvation and confidence in prayer.

John drew from Jesus' allegory of the vine and branches (John 15:1-8) when he wrote, "he that keepeth his commandments dwelleth in him, and he in him." The condition for this mutual indwelling is obedience. Obedience in faith and practice is what it means to dwell. *Dwelleth* indicates a close, personal relationship with Christ, a desire to please Christ no matter the cost.

King David articulated well what it means to dwell when he wrote in Psalm 27:4, "One thing have I desired of the LORD, that will I seek after; that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the LORD, and to enquire in his temple." For David, to be in the Lord's presence was to dwell in the temple, gazing upon the Lord's beauty—something we can do by meditating on God's Word. As we abide in Him and let Him abide in us, we are in the ideal position to learn from Christ and be guided by Him. To dwell in Christ in this manner speaks to the security of the believer—our security in Him.

The mutual fellowship between the believer and Christ is the highlight of the Christian's earthly experience. It is only through abiding in Him that we bear fruit—the fruit of love and obedience (John 15:1-8). Consider the reciprocal effect. The more we believe, love, and obey, the more faith, love, and obedience we produce. As we remain in Christ and produce more fruit from our faith, love, and obedience, our assurance will continue to grow. John wasn't talking about actions we do to earn salvation, but rather, actions that cultivate and deepen our relationship with Christ. This is the essence of remaining in Christ.

When we come to Christ in faith, He comes to dwell in our hearts through His Holy Spirit (Rom. 8:9-10). Even as Christ dwells and remains in our lives through His Holy Spirit, the same Spirit draws us, in turn, to remain in Him and obey Him. As Paul wrote: "work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure" (Phil. 2:12-13).

The working out of our salvation and our remaining in Christ is the result of the Spirit of God first working in us. The proof of the Spirit's presence breeds security in the heart of the believer, and that security breeds fruitfulness and productivity.

Construction of the Golden Gate Bridge began in 1933. As the bridge began to rise hundreds of feet above the San Francisco Bay, it became dangerous work, yet surprisingly, only eleven men died during its construction. Before the days of government safety regulations, the builders made the decision to place a safety net below the workers. The \$130,000 cost of the net was a great investment because it kept the men safe and may have even boosted their productivity.' As followers of Christ, we can be more spiritually productive when we realize we have security. Our sovereign union with Christ can never be broken.

I often visit with doubting Christians. One young lady in particular struggles daily with the reality of her eternal security. She has become so frozen in fear that her spiritual productivity is

minimal. You may find yourself in a similar predicament, feeling confused or condemned. God's promise of forgiveness overrules the heart's sentence of condemnation. Don't base your security on how you *feel*, but on what you *know*. We have victory because we remain in Jesus and He remains in us.

QUESTION 3:

What does it mean to remain in Jesus?

1 John 4:1-4

1 Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world.

2 Hereby know ye the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God:

3 And every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God: and this is that spirit of antichrist, whereof ye have heard that it should come; and even now already is it in the world.

4 Ye are of God, little children, and have overcome them: because greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world.

Our relationship with Christ is the source of our victory over the world. Christ overcame the world through His death, burial, and resurrection. Since the Spirit of Christ resides in every believer, every Christian has likewise been given the power to overcome the world. Christ has conquered everything in this sin-soaked world—including all false prophets and antichrists. Because He is victorious, we are victorious.

We still must be on our guard against these false teachers and false teaching. John admonished his readers, "believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many

false prophets are gone out into the world." *False prophets* are masters of confusion, but the apostle Paul assured us that God is not the author of confusion (1 Cor. 14:33). Instead, God desires for peace to reign in the hearts of His beloved saints.

The responsibility falls on God's people to learn to discern truth from error. We are to "try the spirits." Paul also called for believers to examine those speaking. "Let the prophets speak two or three, and let the other judge" (v. 29). A godly pastor or preacher would not be offended that you weighed what he was saying against the Word of God. The Bereans even "searched the scriptures daily, whether" the teaching of the apostle Paul "were so"; those who did so were called "noble" (Acts 17:11).

The ultimate test is this: what does a teaching or a sermon say about Jesus Christ? Cults and false teachers are infamous for the things they take away from God's Word or the things they add to it (Rev. 22:18-19). But the core doctrine to begin with is where they stand on the truth that "Jesus Christ is come in the flesh."

Jesus is fully man and fully God. Period. He is not 50 percent God and 50 percent man; He is fully human and fully divine at the same time. Jesus the man is the Christ—the Anointed One—of God. Jesus is not, as Mormons profess, a man who became a god. Jesus is not, as Jehovah's Witnesses claim, *a god*; He is *the only* God. He is not the Christ who only appeared to be a man. He is not a created being, not even the highest part of God's creation; instead, He is the One through whom all things were created (Col. 1:15-20). Jesus is God, the second Person of the Trinity who became a man; He knew hunger, exhaustion, sadness, and anger; bled real blood; experienced a bodily death on the cross; and physically rose again.

QUESTION 4:

Where do you see the spirit of antichrist at work in our culture?

John lovingly reminded his readers that, while these false teachers were not from God, the believers were. "Ye are of God, little children." Believers have conquered these master manipulators by the Spirit's indwelling. We do not stand victorious over them because of any skill or mastery within themselves. No, we conquer "because greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world." The Holy Spirit's illumination is far greater than any false teacher's deception. The Spirit gives the true testimony of Christ's identity and enables Christians to persevere in that truth. Christ won the victory, and His people are victorious.

QUESTION 5:

What process do you use to determine if something is of God or the enemy?

ENGAGE

What are some characteristics of false spirits at work in the world today? Use the acrostic below to record your answers. (An example has been provided.) Then answer the questions.

Fear

A

L

S

E

After considering how to discern what is false, what are some ways to have victory over these things in our lives? How can we have victory in Jesus?

LIVE IT OUT

Because Jesus has won the victory, His people are victorious. Choose one of the following applications:

▶ **Examine your life.** Do you struggle with doubt? If so, answer these two questions: Do you believe the truth of Christ as taught in the Scriptures? Do you love other brothers and sisters in Christ? If you answered yes to both, then you have no reason to doubt.

I Align your life. Make sure you are practicing the spiritual disciplines regularly. Practice such things as prayer, Bible study, scripture memory, fasting, journaling, and serving. Each of these disciplines will help you walk with Christ.

▶ **Make a difference in someone's life.** Do you know someone in doubt? Take time this week to walk them through 1 John. Ask them questions like: Do you desire to have fellowship with God? Are you sensitive to sin in your life? Do you have hatred in your heart toward others?



END NOTES

1. 'Construction: Golden Gate Bridge Highway & Transportation District, <https://www.goldengate.org/Orldgae/history-research/bridge-construction/constructionatimeline>.