

THE DESIRABLE LOOP

1 JOHN 5:1-21

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. By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and keep His commandments. For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments. And His commandments are not burdensome.

For whatever is born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world - our faith. Who is he who overcomes the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?

This is He who came by water and blood - Jesus Christ; not only by water, but by water and blood. And it is the Spirit who bears witness, because the Spirit is truth. For there are three that bear witness in heaven: the Father, the Word, and the Holy Spirit; and these three are one. And there are three that bear witness on earth: the Spirit, the water, and the blood; and these three agree as one.

If we receive the witness of men, the witness of God is greater; for this is the witness of God which He has testified of His Son. He who believes in the Son of God has the witness in himself; he who does not believe God has made Him a liar, because he has not believed the testimony that God has given of His Son.

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

God, that you may know that you have eternal life, and that you may continue to believe in the name of the Son of God.

Now this is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. And if we know that He hears us, whatever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we have asked of Him.

If anyone sees his brother sinning a sin which does not lead to death, he will ask, and He will give him life for those who commit sin not leading to death. There is sin leading to death. I do not say that he should pray about that. All unrighteousness is sin, and there is sin not leading to death.

We know that whoever is born of God does not sin; but he who has been born of God keeps himself, and the wicked one does not touch him. We know that we are of God, and the whole world lies under the sway of the wicked one.

And we know that the Son of God has come and has given us an understanding, that we may know Him who is true; and we are in Him who is true, in His Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God and eternal life.

Little children, keep yourselves from idols. Amen.

Pascual Perez is a name that lives in infamy in Atlanta Braves baseball history. Perez was a Braves starting pitcher four seasons, 1982-1984. In his first year with the team, one night Perez was *late* getting to the stadium, and actually missed the game. This was on an evening when he was scheduled to start. Perez spent two hours driving around Interstate 285, looking for the right exit.

He circled the perimeter of metro-Atlanta twice.

When he stopped to get gas, the station attendant recognized him, and said everyone at the ballpark was waiting on him. He gave him directions to the stadium.

From that moment on, Pascual was known as “Perimeter Perez.” He even had a jacket made with “I-285” printed on the back. He got trapped in an endless loop and couldn’t get out... *As did the Apostle John...*

I’ve heard it defined, “A loop is a process where the end is connected to the beginning, so that the process gets continually repeated...” There’re video loops that continually replay... There’re program loops that trap your computer into automatically duplicated commands.

And there are also spiritual loops - where one action leads to another; then to another - it eventually loops back to the beginning, and the process runs repeatedly.

This is what John describes in his letter. Christianity is a wonderful, desirable loop. It begins with **faith**, which leads to **life**, which leads to **love**, which leads to **obedience**, which leads to **victory**, which then refortifies the **faith** with which we started. Then the loop starts all over again. Pascual laps the perimeter one more time.

Chapter 5 takes us on this loop, verse 1, “**Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God...**”

Here’s where Christianity begins - where the spiritual loop starts - **with faith**. You can hit the switch as much as you’d like - turn the key multiple times - and you might hear a clicking noise - your conscience might rattle a bit - but the engine won’t roll over without faith.

I know people who *come to church - learn a few verses - understand a truth or two - even talk about God...* it's like turning the key, but nothing happens.

The engine doesn't fire up until you believe.

You don't become *alive to the things of God, and aware of the Spirit of God*; until you stake your life and destiny on Jesus. If you want to be born of God - alive and aware spiritually - then you have to personally bow to Jesus as the "*Christ*" - that is, *the promised King*.

The English word "*Christ*" is from the Hebrew term, "*Messiah*" - which means "*Anointed One*" - this is what the Jews did to their king, they anointed him with oil.

Thus, Christ is God's "*promised King and Deliverer.*"

Have you trusted your life to Jesus and made Him your king? If not, you've yet to be "*born of God.*"

John continues, "*and everyone who loves Him who begot also loves him who is begotten of Him.*"

Of course, "*to beget*" means "*to sire or to father.*"

In a sense every Christian is "*born of God.*" We're begotten spiritually. The seed of God's Word is planted in our hearts, and the Holy Spirit brings it to life.

But Jesus was "*begotten of God*" in a unique way. He was born of God physically. The Holy Spirit hovered over the womb of a virgin, and God's Son became a man. We know in the case of Jesus this was the only time such a miracle ever occurred; for in his Gospel, John called Jesus (3:16), God's "*only begotten Son.*"

Jesus holds exclusive, celebrated status. He is begotten of God in a way that no one else is begotten.

John says if you love the Father (*“Him who begot”*); then you’ll love His Son (*“who is begotten of Him”*).

The greatest kindness you can do for me is to be nice to one of my kids. Help my son out with a project around his house - or help my daughter-in-law with her kids - *and I’ll treat that like you’ve done **me** a favor!*

And so it is with God. Jesus is God’s **only begotten Son** - thus, to love God is to love His Son Jesus.

But the opposite is also true. Deny or defame God’s only begotten Son, and you reveal your hatred for God.

This is what’s so frightening when you stand before *The Dome Of The Rock* in the heart of Jerusalem. You shutter to see such blatant blasphemy against God.

On the Temple Mount stands a muslim shrine, and wrapped around the top of the building in Arabic script is the blasphemous phrase, **“God does not beget and God is not begotten.”** It’s a targeted assault on John 3:16 and 1 John 5:1. It’s a denial of the deity of Jesus.

This Muslim holy site is on the same ground where the Jewish Temple once stood, and the muslims have made the same mistake as the Jews. They’ve denied the unique birth of God’s **only begotten Son**. It reveals both religions’ hatred for the Savior. John is saying, you don’t love Father in heaven, if you hate His Son.

This is why *the good Jew* or *the peace-loving Muslim* isn't going to heaven. They both have insulted God. They've denied the Son, the Father sent to save us.

John tells us in verse 2, **“By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and keep His commandments.”** Again, how do we know we're truly born of God, and have His love in us - the answer is, *do we love God enough to obey His commands?*

Remember, **true love is willing to love the other person in the way they want or need to be loved - not just love them in the way that's convenient for you.**

This past Friday my wife showed me **true love**. She likes to pull weeds out of our front lawn - *which is a good thing* - as long as you collect the weeds you pull.

But when you pull weeds, and just toss them into the grass - *apparently, so that your husband will have to come back behind you on his hands and knees, and pick up the weeds that you've pulled, it's terrible.*

It's like one of the worst things you can do to a spouse. No wonder he always complains about this...

Well, this Friday, I came home, and on my back porch, for the first time in our 38 year marriage, there was a bucket of weeds. My wife had collected every week she'd pulled, so that her husband wouldn't have to come behind her and pick up weeds... *I felt loved!*

And if you love God, this is how it'll show - you'll love Him in the way He wants to be loved - you'll keep His commandments. You'll be humble and compliant...

Verse 3, **“For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments. And His commandments are not burdensome.”** Don't think you've made some colossal sacrifice by keeping God's commands. It's not like His requirements are grievous and not good for us anyway.

In Matthew 11:30 Jesus said, **“My yoke is easy and My burden is light.”** It was the power-hungry Pharisees, Jewish legalists, who weighed people down with meaningless regulations. They wanted to bully you and keep you under their thumb. They were like the teacher who assigns homework, just to keep you from playing.

On the other hand, Jesus' asks us to do only what's best for us in the first place. His commandments are light and easy. It's our great joy to bring Him pleasure.

When my son, Mack, was living at home I could tell him to wash and wax my car, vacuum out the interior, and armor-all the tires. And by his reaction, you would have thought I'd asked Mack to walk on the moon.

But let's say he had a date, and he wanted to use my car. I wouldn't even have to ask. It's amazing the time he'd spend sprucing up up that car. You'd think he was in the detailing business. *And the difference?*

One word: **“love.”** This is why God's commandments are never a burden. When you love God you'll want to obey Him. You'll see His commands as ways to please the person you love. *What a difference love makes!*

Verse 4, “**For whatever is born of God overcomes the world.**” The world is applying outside pressure on us to conform - *to give in to sin* - but God has planted His Spirit in us. The Holy Spirit mounts an inner resistance.

Thus, the key to us being an overcomer is learning to live from the inside out. Remember, our strength is on the inside. The life of God is growing in us - *His peace, love, joy, power, wisdom* - is swelling up inside us.

The Christian life is like a helium-filled balloon. Fill a balloon with helium and it rises, despite the gravity that wants to keep it down. The life of God’s Spirit also gives us a buoyancy - a spiritual lift - that not only helps us *undergo hardships*, but *overcome hardships*.

“**And this is the victory that has overcome the world - our faith.**” What’s the key to inside-out living? It’s *faith!* Our trust in Jesus activates His life and power in us.

But verse 5, “**Who is he who overcomes the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?**”

In verse 4 John wrote, “*this is the victory... our faith*” but in verse 5 he clarifies that it’s not just faith - it’s not just sincere faith... it’s faith in God’s Son, Jesus.

Faith is only as good as its object.

It’s interesting, the Greek word translated “*victory*” in verse 4 is “*nike*,” which was also the name of the Greek goddess of victory. Apparently, she wore fancy sneakers, with a swoosh logo... Whenever you see the Nike swoosh - *and you won’t*

have to look very far, it's everywhere - let it remind you of our victory in Christ.

Literally we could read verse 4, “**And this is the *nike* that has overcome the world...**” And if you're thinking of the shoe manufacturer don't conclude “**just do it.**”

The opposite attitude should be true of a Christian. God doesn't want us to *just do it*. We're told, “***This is the nike that has overcome the world - our faith.***”

Jesus did the work for us, and we need to learn to apply **His** victory. It's our faith that unlocks His power.

So here is how Christianity is a repeating loop...

We begin with *faith*. Faith in Jesus produces *spiritual life*. Life means *love for God*, and a *willingness to keep His commandments* - which causes *spiritual lift* and *victory over the world* - which reinforces our *faith...*

Which brings us back to *life...* and on and on we go. As Christians we grow *from grace to grace to grace*.

Remember, John's letter addresses the dangerous heresy that would later be called *Gnosticism*. It was a heretical belief that denied Jesus was God-in-the-flesh.

And there were two types of Gnosticism... Both were named after the men who championed the heresies...

First, was **Docetic Gnosticism**. It taught that Jesus was a ghost, a phantom. He had not really come in the flesh. His body was only an illusion - an apparition.

The other branch was **Cerinthian Gnosticism**. It taught that the Spirit of Christ came on the man, Jesus, at His baptism.

But departed before He was crucified. So that it wasn't the Son of God who was put to death.

Here in a single verse John cuts down both heretical branches... Verse 6, **“This is He who came by water and blood - Jesus Christ; not only by water, but by water and blood. And it is the Spirit who bears witness, because the Spirit is truth.”** Water refers to Jesus' birth. His mother's water broke. Jesus was born of a human birth. He was not a phantom. He was flesh and bone.

The blood refers to His death. The Savior of men, the Son of God, spilled literal blood upon the cross.

Jesus was *God at birth* and *God at death* - both His *sinless birth* and *innocent death* combined to save us.

“For there are three that bear witness in heaven: the Father, the Word, and the Holy Spirit; and these three are one.” *Here is where we find some controversy...*

Realize, the authors of the New Testament wrote in Greek. Our English Bible is a translation of the Greek.

We don't have the author's original writings, but we do have copies of ancient scrolls - some dating back to the first century. To be exact, there are 5800 Greek copies of the New Testament. Scholars have examined these different scrolls, and their minimal variations, and have determined their content is in 95% agreement.

The few variations are mostly spelling and grammar. They account for zero discrepancies in doctrine.

Now, since 1 John 5:7 appears in just a few very late Greek manuscripts, its authenticity has been questioned. Some newer translations leave it out. The King James translators chose to include the verse, but in the New King James there's a qualifying notation.

It is interesting, that none of the early church fathers used this verse to defend the doctrine of the Trinity. We have various writings where they argued over this point. That's strange since verse 7 is so clear. The phrase "these three are one" is certainly definitive.

It's possible verse 7 was added later - in the 14th or 15th century AD. And thus, it shouldn't be in the Bible.

If that's true, it means the King James translators made a mistake - not John, and not God. The original writings were inerrant. God made sure that what was written was exactly what He intended. But the compilation of the material involved human decisions.

The question of verse 7 is one of *translation* not *inspiration*. Was it the work of an over-zealous scribe who got carried away, and took it upon himself to reinforce a doctrine? Or was it penned by John?

It was probably the scribe. But this verse doesn't teach anything not repeated in the rest of the Bible.

The Father, the Word, and the Spirit are one God.

The moral of the story is that the Scripture *originally written* doesn't need our help. It conveys all the essential doctrines, without us adding to it in any way.

There is no doubt as to the authenticity of verse 8, “And there are three that bear witness on earth: the Spirit, the water, and the blood; and these three agree as one.” Remember, John wrote this verse to counter the Gnostics - and in that regard it’s a fitting argument.

Jesus was born a man - “*the water.*” A dove lighted upon Him at His baptism - “*the Spirit.*” And Jesus the man died a human death on the cross - “*the blood.*”

Thus, all three witnesses - “*the Spirit, the water, and the blood*” - His baptism, birth, and death - all agree on Jesus’ dual-nature - He’s *fully God and fully human.*

Verse 9, “If we receive the witness of men, the witness of God is greater; for this is the witness of God which He has testified of His Son. He who believes in the Son of God has the witness in himself; he who does not believe God has made Him a liar, because he has not believed the testimony that God has given of His Son.” The Spirit, water, blood - testified of Jesus. This was God’s objective stamp of approval on Jesus.

But *the fourth witness* is the indwelling Holy Spirit.

A true believer has an inner, subjective assurance that Jesus is *who He says He is* - that Jesus is God!

Verse 11, “And this is the testimony: that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life.” I’ve seen men kick back by the lake with a fishing pole in hand - or in the ocean on a surfboard - or at the golf course

on a stellar day - and say to their friends, **“This is the life!”** - *but is it?*

“Wow, some folks are satisfied with so little.”

If participating in a temporary pleasure, or a physical thrill causes you to say, **“This is the life!”** - then think again! If all life is to you is scratching an itch - how sad!

Real life is being touched by the God who created you... **Real life** is brushing up against eternity, and knowing your life will count forever... **“He who has the Son has life.”** **Real life** is encountering Jesus Christ...

“These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life, and that you may continue to believe in the name of the Son of God.” John wants us to know we have eternal life and **“continue to believe.”**

Throughout the NT we learn it's not enough to believe once - we're exhorted to *continue in our faith*.

Verse 14, **“Now this is the confidence that we have in Him, if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. And if we know that He hears us, whatever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we have asked of Him.”** If God hears our prayers we can be confident He'll answer them. *In His time and in His way, certainly, but He promises to answer all the prayers He hears...*

So the key to prayer is to get your prayers heard!

But does God hear all our prayers? The answer to that is **“yes”** and **“no.”** Sure God is omniscient. *He sees all - He*

knows all - He hears all! But in another sense He doesn't hear every prayer - *and we should be glad!*

Here's a riddle for you, *What do you get when you cross a termite with a praying mantas?* Answer: *an insect that says grace before he eats your house.*

You hope God doesn't hear the prayer of a termite!

There are prayers I've prayed I'm glad God didn't hear. After I prayed it, I wished I could take it back.

If you have kids you know when they're little they whine a lot. They ask for everything, and when they don't get it they ask again. When my kids were little, and started to whine - I'd respond, *"I can't hear you!"*

I would just refuse to entertain their quibbling. *I'm glad God takes the same approach with adult whiners.*

God answers only prayers He really hears - prayers that make it past His ears and down into His heart.

This is why when we pray according to God's will, that's when we're certain our prayers will be answered.

Verse 16, *"If anyone sees his brother sinning a sin which does not lead to death, he will ask, and He will give him life for those who commit sin not leading to death. There is sin leading to death. I do not say that he should pray about that. All unrighteousness is sin, and there is sin not leading to death."* The Bible lists a few cases of sins that led directly to someone's death.

In **Leviticus 10**, two priests, Nadab and Abihu, polluted the worship of God, and were struck dead.

In **Numbers 16** the ground swallowed a rebellious Korah, for defying Moses, the God-appointed authority.

And in **2 Samuel 6** Uzzah was struck down dead when he touched the sacred Ark with sinful hands.

Even in the NT there were sins leading to death.

In **Acts 5**, Ananias and Sapphira died when they pretended to be more spiritual than they really were.

They played the hypocrite, and lied to the Holy Spirit.

As a matter of fact, John may've expected one of his own contemporaries to be struck down by God.

One of John's disciples, Polycarp, writes of an occasion when the leading Gnostic, Cerinthus, was inside the Roman bath-house that John had entered.

When John was told who was there, he rushed out, shouting, **“Let us fly, lest the bath-house fall down, because Cerinthus, the enemy of the truth, is within.”**

John, the apostle of love, never put it passed a God of truth to judge a spiritual liar when He deemed it time.

Of course, the sin that leads to death is not always the same sin - and a person who commits the same sin under a different set of circumstances may be spared.

Let's face it, if everybody who played the hypocrite and claimed to be more spiritual than they are were struck dead - like Ananias and Sapphira - we'd have a smaller crowd here today. People would sing, **“All to Jesus I surrender...”** and they'd start dropping like flies.

But there are *certain acts* that in *certain situations* prove to be such a blight on the Body of Christ that God sees fit to arrange an early exit for the perpetrator! I've heard modern examples as well as biblical ones.

John's point is if you see a brother sin, pray for him. If it's leading to death you'll know soon enough. If it's not, then your prayer could just turn him or her around.

Verse 18, "**We know that whoever is born of God does not sin...**" We discussed this in Chapter 3, it could be translated, "**whoever is born of God does not continue in sin.**" We all can stumble - but a person who's been born of God doesn't sin habitually.

The power of God lives inside them. No one's perfect, but God eventually makes us an overcomer.

John goes on, "**but he who has been born of God keeps himself, and the wicked one does not touch him. We know that we are of God, and the whole world lies under the sway of the wicked one.**" I hope you don't believe the devil lives in Hell - *that Hell is his hangout.*

Satan doesn't want to go Hell anymore than we do.

The book of Job teaches us that Satan is going "**To and fro on the earth, and... walking back and forth on it.**" Apparently, the whole world is his turf. As John puts it, "***the whole world lies under the sway of (Satan).***"

At the moment the devil is alive and well on planet Earth. He has been allowed a very broad latitude.

But there is one place the devil and his demons can't intrude without God's specific approval - **that's a man who's been born of God!** We're **“the untouchables.”**

Remember, Satan couldn't harm a single hair on Job's head without first getting God's permission.

Recall the verse from a few weeks ago, I asked you to memorize, 1 John 4:4, **“He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world.”** God is greater than Satan, his hordes, and anything he can throw at us...

At times God allows Satan to tempt us, and test us, but you can be sure it's always for a good purpose.

Verse 20, **“And we know that the Son of God has come and has given us an understanding, that we may know Him who is true...”** Throughout this book John has dropped reasons why Jesus came into the world...

In 3:5, **“He was manifested to take away our sins...”**

In 3:8, **“that He might destroy the works of the devil.”**

In 4:9, **“that we might live through Him.”**

And in 4:10, **“to be our propitiation.”**

And now here in 5:20 John tells us, **“the Son of God has come and has given us an understanding, that we may know Him...”** Jesus came to reveal God to us.

God has revealed Himself to mankind *in His written Word, the Bible* - and *in His living Word, Jesus Christ*.

The Bible tells us **God is love...** but Jesus touched a leper's skin - and forgave a woman the crowd wanted to stone - and gave a dead daughter back to her father.

The Scriptures speak of **God's patience...** but Jesus forgives a broken Peter on the shores of Galilee and recommissions him even after the ultimate failure.

The OT spends page after page telling us about our God - but it's not the same as seeing Him in action.

You could say, the Bible is *the book*, whereas Jesus is *the movie...* The Bible tells us what God is like, but Jesus shows us. It's *the declaration* and *the illustration*.

Verse 20, **“And we are in Him who is true, in His Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God and eternal life.”**

Jesus Christ is **“the true God.”** He alone has **“eternal life.”** We need to fall at His feet and worship!

Today's notion that it really doesn't matter what you believe in, as long as you believe in something, is ludicrous. **Our faith is only as good as its object.**

To say it doesn't matter what a man believes as long as he's sincere, is like telling a doctor his diagnosis doesn't really matter as long as he tries his best...

Or it's like telling a pharmacist it doesn't really matter if the prescription he fills is accurate, as long as he sincerely believes he's trying to help his patient.

Realize, 7000 people die each year in the US from prescription errors. A wrong prescription can be lethal.

And the same is true in matters of faith. John is clear, there is one true God - Jesus Christ. He alone has eternal life. To live forever you must believe in Jesus!

John ends his letter, “Little children, keep yourselves from idols. Amen.” Don’t think idolatry was an ancient problem, with no relevance to modern Americans.

We’re just as vulnerable to idolatry as the pagan with the statue on his mantle. Anything we value in life more highly than Jesus has in essence become our idol.

St. Augustine’s definition of idolatry has been helpful to me. “Idolatry is worshiping anything that ought to be used, or using anything that is meant to be worshiped.”

Material possessions are tools to be used for God’s glory - but when we forget they’re a means to an ends, and treat them as ends in themselves, we’ve made them an idol...
“Keep yourselves from idols.”

The Braves pitcher, Pascal Perez, got caught in the wrong kind of loop, but if you and I live life as John describes, we can get ourselves in *the desirable loop*.

Faith produces life, *life* produces love, *love* produces obedience, *obedience* produces victory, and *victory* produces *more faith*. That’s the kind of loop I long for.

The victory that overcomes the world is our faith!