

1 John Overview

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[0 : 00] Okay, let's now turn to our Bible reading, which is in the first letter of John, chapter 5, which you'll find in page number 1023 in the blue hardback Bibles.

So that's 1 John, chapter 5, and we're going to read from verses 1 to 5. 1 John, chapter 5, and we're going to read from verses 1 to 5.

The victory that has overcome the world, our faith. Who is it that overcomes the world except the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?

Amen. May God bless this reading to us. Amen.

Well, I invite you to take your Bibles and to turn with me again to the book of 1 John, which you will find in page 1021 of the Pure Bible.

[1 : 50] And as you do so, let me pray. Amen. Make the book live to me, O Lord. Show me thyself within thy word.

Show me myself and show me my Savior. And make the book live to me. For Jesus' sake. Amen. Well, we live in a world of must-haves. Let me explain what I mean. Every Christmas, there is the must-have toy for children.

And every year, for bigger children, there are the must-have gadgets. New mobile phones or new computers. There are the must-haves. And this also extends to clothing and to footwear.

The ladies amongst us, I'm sure, in years gone by, the must-haves, Ugg boots. Or in recent days, Hunter wellies. Well, things were no different when I was a boy at school.

[2 : 57] At primary school. I remember one year, the must-have training shoes were a pair of trainers called Adidas kick. Everybody who was anybody had a pair of Adidas kick.

And I just longed to have a pair of Adidas kick. But I was from a big family. My parents had six boys. So money was quite tight. But I remember one day in particular, my mum was going out to buy me and my younger brother a new pair of training shoes.

And in the school playground that day, my younger brother came up to me and he told me, my mum's buying us a pair of Adidas kick. Well, you can imagine my delight. I started telling all my friends, I'm getting a pair of Adidas kick.

I ran home from school that day. I couldn't wait to put on my new training shoes. Mum, where are my new trainers? I shouted as I burst through the door. They're in your room, son, she said.

I burst into my room. And there in the floor were a pair of training shoes that were black in colour, just like Adidas kick. They had white stripes down the side of the shoe, just like Adidas kick.

[4 : 09] But these training shoes had four stripes. And you laugh, because you know as well as I do, that real, authentic Adidas training shoes have three stripes.

No one, regardless of who they were, could convince me that the new training shoes lying on my room floor were Adidas kick. Because I knew that real, authentic Adidas training shoes have three stripes.

Now friends, I share this story as a helpful way into this morning's sermon. John's purpose in writing this letter you will see in chapter 5, verse 13. I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God that you may know you have eternal life.

So John is writing to believers so that they would know they have eternal life. John was writing to give them assurance. Much of this letter is based around three marks or three tests that John gives in order that his readers would have assurance.

So just like my Adidas training shoes, John in this letter is saying there are three marks, three tests that denote real, authentic Christians.

[5 : 28] And these are the test of belief, the test of love, and the test of obedience. But if you're anything like me, when you read through 1 John and as you compare yourself against the three

tests, you would feel discouraged.

You would feel anything but assurance as you just don't measure up. But there is more to the letter than this. Why would John feel the need to write to these particular believers to give them assurance?

Well, if we look at chapter 2, verse 26, we get an insight into what was going on in their particular situation. I write these things to you about those who are trying to deceive you.

So John writes to give assurance as there were others who were trying to lead them astray. And in chapter 2, verse 19, the identity of this group is revealed.

They went out from us, but they were not of us. For if they had been of us, they would have continued with us. But they went out that it might become plain that they all are not of us.

[6 : 42] So we see the situation. This group had been part of the church, but now they have left. And this wasn't a case of some folks going off to plant a church.

No, this was a case of them moving away from the teaching of the church altogether. The church that had been founded on the teaching of the apostles. They had left, and they were now making some amazing claims.

And among some of the claims, they were now totally free from sin. And it's understandable that all of this had confused and badly shaken all those who had been left behind.

And it's also understandable that they would have many questions. Are we really Christians? Do we have the real and full gospel? Those folks that left us, are they right?

Is it possible to be totally free from sin now? Have we missed out on something? So the apostle John is writing to bring assurance to the church.

[7 : 46] And he does this, not by teaching them anything new. No, he does so by reminding them of the gospel that they already have. So the three tests that John gives are to reassure the church and also to reveal that those who went out from them were never really of the church.

So what we will aim to do this morning is to grasp something of the overall message of the book. And the preaching here at the Tron, we are used to going through books of the Bible verse by verse and chapter by chapter.

But this morning, we will aim to cover the whole book by way of an overview. So this morning, we will have a one John overview. One John in one sermon. Or as we would say here in Glasgow, one John in a whanee.

As I've already said, the letter is based around these three tests of real authentic Christianity.

But the tests are not neatly divided up into chapters. They are woven throughout the letter. So we will begin in the verses that were read to us from chapter five, as that is where the three tests are found together.

[8 : 57] So let us look firstly at the belief test, chapter five, verse one. Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been born of God.

Everyone who is born of God, everyone who is a real Christian, believes that Jesus is the Christ. John starts his letter in chapter one, verses one to three, by emphatically presenting the historical reality of Jesus.

That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we looked upon and have touched with our hands concerning the word of life.

The life was made manifest and we have seen it and testified to it and proclaimed to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was made manifest to us. That which we have seen and heard, we proclaim also to you, so that you too may have fellowship with us.

And indeed, our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ. John is reassuring the church. We've seen him. We heard him.

[10 : 08] We touched the real Jesus. We were there in time, space, history. And we can begin to work out the reasons why John was spelling this out.

As it seems one of the things that these false teachers were teaching is that the incarnation didn't really happen. Chapter 4, verse 2. By this you know the Spirit of God.

Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God. So it appears that these false teachers didn't believe that God had really appeared and lived among us as a man, a real man.

So John is reminding them of the historical reality of Jesus. Jesus is the Christ and he appeared in the flesh. John and the other apostles saw him, they heard him, and they touched him.

Jesus existed. But friends, it's not enough to believe that Jesus existed. There is not a historian worth of salt would deny that Jesus existed. The belief test is not just to believe the historical reality of Jesus, but to believe all that the apostles have handed down and passed on concerning Jesus, concerning his birth, his life, his substitutionary death on the cross for the forgiveness of sins, his resurrection from the dead, and his soon coming and judgment.

[11 : 34] We have no authority. We have no right to mess about with the apostolic gospel that has been handed down, that has been passed on. For apostolic preaching and teaching is the foundation on which the church of Jesus Christ is built.

That is how the true church of Jesus Christ is to be built, built upon the preaching and teaching of Jesus' apostles. That is exactly what the Lord Jesus Christ commanded before his ascension into heaven at the end of Matthew's gospel.

There is no need to turn these verses up. But the Lord Jesus Christ said, And Jesus came and said to them, All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you.

Teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. How did the Lord Jesus Christ envisage his church being built? Through the apostles teaching and preaching all that Jesus had commanded them.

Christian belief is about believing the message of Jesus that he commanded his apostles to preach. But friends, this is not just the way the church of Jesus Christ was to be established.

[12 : 55] This is how the true church of Jesus Christ are to continue. Listen to how the apostle Paul instructs his son in the faith and fellow worker Timothy. And what you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.

This is true apostolic succession. Passing on the message of the apostles. Not adding to it or subtracting from it. And reading through 1 John you will see that these false teachers were making some spectacular claims.

They claimed that they were free from sin now chapter 1 verse 8. And these claims these beliefs set them outside of the one true gospel delivered to the church.

Friends, that's the results. That's where adding to or taking away from the gospel takes you. It takes you outside the gospel. And there are many extreme views of this down through the years where people have combined some Christian doctrine with their own ideas.

Maybe resulting in a Christian cult. And in many occasions these cults have not ended in salvation or being free from sin.

[14 : 15] But in mass suicide. Absolutely tragic. But it's not just extreme groups who fall tragically outside of the apostolic gospel. No, don't think that for a minute friends.

What about the very lovely and charming person that you maybe meet at a friend's dinner party or some other social gathering. They hear that you're a Christian and they ask which church do you attend?

And you say I attend the Tron church. Oh they say I used to go to the Tron during my student days. I'm so grateful for the teaching I received there and for my evangelical roots.

I used to believe the things that they teach there but I have moved on from there to a much mature faith. And their mature faith turns out to be something totally unrecognisable from the teaching of the apostles.

That's why friends doctrine matters. Now I know lots of folks think oh here we go doctrine because doctrine is seen as a barrier to fellowship as doctrine and theology are just seen as things that Christians disagree on.

[15 : 23] But friends doctrine isn't a barrier to fellowship. Doctrine is a safeguard against false teaching. You would only have to read through the New Testament to see how the church from the very beginning has had to fight against false teachers.

And how were these false teachers thought? They were fought with truth. Friends truth really matters. John loves the church and he is devoted to caring for their spiritual well-being.

and he is very clear about the importance of truth. Just the other week I was chatting to a friend of mine who now lives in Wales. He's a Glasgow boy.

He was a drug addict but he was converted about eight years ago and this boy has been on fire for Jesus since the very first day he became a Christian. But recently he was asked by the pastor of the

church that he attends to become a church member.

But he said he couldn't join. as part of the vows of membership was to confess that he believed that someone who was genuinely saved could lose their salvation.

[16:29] And he said to me, Terry I cannot be bothered with all this doctrine stuff. I just want to tell people the simple gospel message of Jesus. Now friends that sounds good doesn't it?

But as soon as you begin to tell people the simple gospel message of Jesus then you're drawing on theology. You're drawing on doctrine. Maybe this week you might get a chap at your door and you might answer your door and there standing are two Jehovah's witnesses.

They've got Bibles in their hands and they're talking about Jesus. But who is Jesus? Are they talking about the real Jesus? Is the message they are peddling at your door the message of Jesus as preached by his apostles?

No it's not. Jesus says John says hold on to the real Jesus. The real Jesus that was preached by his apostles. Let what you heard from the beginning abide in you.

If what you heard from the beginning abides in you then you too will abide in the Son and in the Father. Well firstly the belief test. Let us move now secondly to the love test.

[17:39] Chapter 5 verse 1. Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been born of God and everyone who loves the Father loves whoever has been born of him.

The second test that you will see throughout this letter is the test of Christian love and in particular love for one another in the church. If you have come to know the love of God the Father, if he has adopted you into his family, then this will show itself in love for his other adopted children.

John is saying if you have been gripped by the real gospel then you will love one another. The mark of Christian love runs all the way through one John like the word blackpool through a stick of rock. Chapter 4 verse 19. We love because he first loved us. If anyone says I love God and hates his brother he is a liar.

For he who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen. And this commandment we have from him whoever loves God must also love his brother.

[18:53] And again in chapter 3 verse 16. By this we know love that he laid down his life for us and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers.

But if anyone has the world's goods and sees his brother in need yet closes his heart against him how does God's love abide in him? Little children let us not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth.

So you see friends the love test flows right on from and right out of the belief test. You need to know firstly who Jesus is and what he did in the cross.

And what he did in the cross was out of his love for you even when you were his enemy. Friends the evidence of how much we have grasped the amazing sacrificial love of Jesus will be seen in how much we love our Christian brothers and sisters and in particular the ones we don't like that much or find harder to get along with.

Can you see how practical that is? Can you see how Christ like that is? Jesus didn't just love us with words. He didn't just say he loved us.

[20:08] It wasn't just the feeling that he had for us. No. He loved us practically. He loved us by his actions and laying down his life for us. And friends loving one another in a fellowship like this is one of the best things we can do practically to stop each other from drifting.

What was the words from the hymn that we sang earlier? Let love be found among us. A love from God alone, the hallmark of the children whom God delights to own.

Love is the hallmark of God's children. That's what the apostle Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 13. If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels but have not love, I am a noisy gong and a clanging cymbal.

And if I have prophetic powers and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith so as to remove mountains but have not love, I am nothing. And if I give away all that I have, and if I deliver up my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing.

Love is the hallmark of God's children. It shows that our faith, to quote David Dickinson, is the real deal. Think of the difference that this makes to the non-Christian who looks in from the outside and sees a motley crew like us loving one another.

[21:30] a motley crew drawn from many different backgrounds, different situations and countries who have absolutely nothing in common, nothing to unite us except that the Lord Jesus Christ first

loved us and now we love one another.

People may think we're off our heads for believing what we believe, but what should be undeniable about us is a love for one another. Let love be found among us, a love from God alone, the hallmark of the children whom God delights to own.

The belief test, the love test, and thirdly and finally, the obedience test. We have seen that love flows from belief and it's the same for obedience.

Obedience flows from love. Chapter 5 verse 2. By this we know that we love the children of God when we love God and obey his commandments.

So loving others isn't primarily about having warm fuzzy feelings. No, it's all about obedience to God. Look at chapter 5 verse 3. For this is the love of God that we keep his commandments and his commandments are not burdensome.

[22 : 51] For everyone who has been born of God overcomes the world and this is the victory that has overcome the world of faith. So friends, you can't say that you have real authentic Christian faith that internally your heart has been changed and yet externally there is no change, no effect.

We can't just go and do what we want as Christians. We can't go and do what we like, do what suits us. No, you're no longer your own. You were bought with a price, therefore honour God with your body.

Real authentic Christian belief will show itself in obedience to God's commands. Real authentic faith can be tested by obedience.

Our obedience to God's commands is not to earn God's favour. Our obedience won't save us. No, instead our obedience is a response to being saved.

Our obedience to God's commands is a mark that Jesus Christ has made us a new creation. Our obedience is a demonstration that real change has been effected in our lives by the real grace of God at work within our lives.

[24 : 07] Friends, remember the context into which John is writing. He is writing to Christians who have been badly shaken by these false teachers. These false teachers who used to be in their church but have left and taken a load of folks with them.

They have made spectacular claims about being free from sin. But friends, let's be honest. Who here among us is not a sinner? Not one of us. We are all sinners.

And without the grace and goodness of God working in our lives, none of us would ever see any obedience to God's commands. And so verse 5 of chapter 5 asks, Who is it that overcomes the world except the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?

And so you see, that brings us full circle back to where we started, the belief test. So all of these tests are intertwined.

It's not enough to just believe the right things, to be theologically correct, but this belief must show itself to be loving and obedient to God's commands.

[25 : 14] And the only way you're ever going to do that is through the new birth that comes through faith in Jesus Christ alone. Friends, read through 1 John this week and see where John in his letter puts the weight of our assurance.

It's not on us and our adherence to these three tests, but on Jesus. Because let's be honest, as we go through these tests, I am sure we do see some evidences of these things in our lives, others.

But we also see failings in them too. Do I always hold to the truth? Or do I sometimes want to change it? Do I always love others as I ought?

No, I don't. Do I always obey God's commands perfectly? No, I don't. But friends, we do have someone who has done that, the Lord Jesus Christ.

But friends, that doesn't let us off the hook. These tests are real. We can take great comfort in seeing God's work within us, bringing our lives into line with his word.

[26 : 21] And we can use these three tests to test the latest spiritual bandwagon that rolls into town. Friends, none of us will ever go to heaven because we held to the truth enough, or loved people enough, or even obeyed God's commands enough.

It is by God's grace alone, through faith alone, in Jesus Christ alone. Let us give the last word this morning to the Apostle John. And this is the testimony that God gave us eternal life.

And this life is in his Son. Whoever has the Son has life. Amen. Let us pray. Father, we thank you for the Bible.

We pray the truth of your word would be sunk deep in our hearts and lives. That our love for the Lord Jesus Christ would show itself in love for our brothers and sisters in Christ and in obedience to your commands so that nothing or no one would be able to deceive us or to rule us. And in doing so, we would bring great glory to your name. In Jesus' name. Amen.