

FIRST JOHN

Chapter 5

Overcoming the World

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. 2 By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and obey his commandments. 3 For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments. And his commandments are not burdensome. 4 For everyone who has been born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith. 5 Who is it that overcomes the world except the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?

St. John is writing in view of the growing heresy of Gnosticism, which held that matter was evil and spirit was good. Some said that Christ only seemed to have a human body (Docetism). It was unthinkable to the Gnostics that the Son of God would become a physical human being, since flesh was evil. Others held that the divine Christ came upon the man Jesus in His Baptism and left Him when He was crucified (Cerinthianism). For the Greek it was unreasonable that the Son of God would be crucified. John testifies that indeed the man Jesus is the Son of God (v. 5), and indeed He is the one who came not by water only, but “by water and blood” (v.6) (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 10, Part 2)

5:1 *Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God.* Faith in Jesus as the Christ is a sign of being born again, just as love is (4:7). (CSB)

Only those born of God are able to believe in Jesus as their Savior, true God and true man. (TLSB)

Beginning our text are the words *pas ho pisteuōn*, “Each believing one.” The present participle indicates an ongoing and constant state of faith. The object of the faith is Jesus, the Christ/Messiah. Such a believing one has already been “born of God” (perfect tense verb for completed action; NIV translates as if it were a present). “Born” reminds the reader of John’s earlier discussion of being “born of God” (Jn 1:13), “born again/from above” (Jn 3:3, 7) through “water and the Spirit” (Jn 3:5) in Holy Baptism. All that follows speaks of the fruit of the state of faith resulting from the new birth. Fruit flows from “the love God has for us” (4:16). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 4, Part 2)

This is a great verse to reassure Christians of their salvation. Whoever believes in Jesus, the Christ, has already been reborn unto eternal life—period. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 4, Part 2)

“born of God”: (*ek tou theou gegennētai*, perf. pass. of *gennaō* “of God has been begotten”). The *ek tou theou* here and *ex autou* at the end of the verse in “having been begotten of/from him” indicate that the sense is a “begetting of/from the father” (A. T. Robertson, Lenski). See 2:29; 3:9; 4:7; 5:4, 18. “The Johannine writings use the expression *gennēthēnai ek* (to be begotten of) to describe the origin of the believer” (Colin Brown, *The Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, vol 1, “Birth,” I. Guhrt [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1981] 179). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 10, Part 2)

New life, rebirth, faith comes of and “from” God. It is something God does as surely as begetting is something that a human father does. We do not “beget” ourselves. The believer is “born from above and again” (Jn 3:3). *Gennēthēi anōthen* is purposely ambiguous and means both born from above and born again (Arndt Gingrich, *A Greek Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* [Chicago: University of Chicago, 1957] 76). The rebirth is given from the Father: “children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband’s will, but born of God” (*ek theou*) (Jn 1:13). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 10, Part 2)

pisteuo to *have faith* —believe, commit (to trust), put in trust with. (CSB)

The present participle indicates an ongoing and constant state of faith. The object of the faith is Jesus. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 4, Part 2)

He is presently, actively believing. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 10, Part 2)

Anybody who believes that the man Jesus of Nazareth is the Christ, that is, everything the OT predicted about that Christ (that is, the Anointed One” or “Messiah”) must have been reborn by God’s initiative and power. (PBC)

1 Corinthians 12:3, “Therefore I tell you that no one who is speaking by the Spirit of God says, “Jesus be cursed,” and no one can say, “Jesus is Lord,” except by the Holy Spirit.”

gannaō - to *procreate*; figuratively to *regenerate*:—bear, beget, be born, bring forth, conceive. – New life, rebirth, faith comes of and from God. It is something God does as surely as begetting is something that a human father does. We do beget ourselves. The believer is born from above and again (John 3:3)

All that follows speaks of the fruit of the state of faith resulting from new birth. Fruit flows from “the love God has for us” (4:16). (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 4, Part 2)

Here verse 1 summarizes the message of 4:7-21: If you have been born again, you love God. If you love God, you will automatically love people. If you love the Father, you will love His children too. Seamless. (PBC)

the Christ. “Jesus is the Christ”: Definite article. He is the Messiah. He did not become the Christ. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 10, Part 2)

everyone who loves the father loves whoever has been born of him. John wrote at a time when members of a family were closely associated as a unit under the headship of the father. He could therefore use the family as an illustration to show that anyone who loves God the Father will naturally love God’s children. (CSB)

Since all believers are born of God, they are all one family of God. All who have fellowship with God by faith in Jesus also share in fellowship with one another. (TLSB)

The rest of v 1 simply and logically says that whoever loves the Father, who gives the new birth, also loves those who have been reborn. In the Third Article of the Creed, we confess both the

Baptism that gives the forgiveness of sins, and the catholic church that results from the new birth. If we love God (a fruit of faith), then we also love one another as fellow Christians. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 4, Part 2)

“Everyone who believes”: Original language (“everyone believing,” pres. part). He is presently, actively believing. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 10, Part 2)

“And everyone who loves the father loves his child as well”: Cf. 4:7: “everyone who loves (pres. part.) has been born of God (*ek tou theou*) and knows God.” (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 10, Part 2)

“Loves his child as well”: Original language (“loves the one having been begotten of /from him”). We show our love for our Father by loving the brother or sister who was begotten by the same heavenly Father. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 10, Part 2)

5:2 *we love the children of God when we love God* – The loving is something that keeps on being done. The love of God and his children, our brothers and sisters, are mutually inclusive, and the one gives proof of the other. (CSB)

We evidence our love for God and his children by “carrying out his commands.” God’s *entolai*, “commands,” like his statutes in the Torah, encompass both Law and Gospel. They include all that our Lord taught and commissioned us to do, as he said: “baptizing . . . and teaching them to observe everything I have commanded you” (Mt 28:19–20). The “obedience that comes from faith” (Rom 1:5) could be brought in here. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 4, Part 2)

Original language “And whenever we keep on doing (present subjunctive) His commandments.” The love of God and the love of His children, our brothers and sisters, are mutually inclusive, and the one gives proof of the other. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 10, Part 2)

Real faith and real love are inseparable. They are like heads and tails on a coin – two faces of the same power. Loving God automatically involves being willing to submit to God, to put His thoughts and ideals into your head, to let Him steer your behavior, to view obedience as exhilarating, not demeaning. (PBC)

The goal of saving us was not merely negative – to get us out of hell – but to transform us into something positive, to be men and women who think and act like God. (PBC)

5:3 *this is the love of God*. The love of God is so powerful that it inspires and enables one to keep His Commandments. But only those who keep His Commandments by loving their brother truly walk in God’s love. (TLSB)

his commands are not burdensome. † Not because the commands themselves are light or easy to obey but, as John explains in v. 4, because of the new birth. The one born of God through faith is enabled by the Holy Spirit to obey. (CSB)

In contrast to the demands of the old covenant. With the Gospel, believers cannot help but love one another; it is what children of God naturally do. (TLSB)

The love of God (objective genitive) is manifest in the relationship between God and the believer. God is our loving Father. We respond to the new birth by embracing his commands—again, the

whole Word, Law and Gospel. His commands are not heavy or burdensome. Religions based on Law are unbearably heavy, as Jesus said (Lk 11:46). Christianity is not one of them, for Jesus lifts those burdens and replaces them with his “easy” yoke (Mt 11:30). Because we have been born anew of God, we delight in his Word (Psalm 119). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 4, Part 2)

Here’s a surprise: God’s commands now become joyful to obey. The law of God is indeed bad news to people without faith in Christ. But believers love to hear God’s will and do it. His commands are not burdensome. His yoke really is easy and His burden real is light. How many heads fit in a yoke? Two, right? Who is pulling alongside of you? Jesus, of course. He daily assures us of forgiveness for our failure and gives us strength and stamina for each new day. Psalm 119:35 says, “Direct me in the path of your commands, for there I find delight.” WE come to see that all commandments of God really are good for us and actually lead to happiness. (PBC)

The love of God (objective genitive) is manifest in the relationship between God and believer. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 4, Part 2)

“This is love for God: to obey his commandments. And his commands are not burdensome”: cf. Jn 15:12, 14. “His commands are not burdensome”: “Not because the commands themselves are light or easy to obey but, as John explains in v 4, because of the new birth. The one born of God through faith is enabled by the Holy Spirit to obey” (*Concordia Self-Study Bible* [St. Louis: Concordia, 1984] 1931). The Father through his Spirit gives us new life and with it a new delight in the commandments of God. The keeping of his commandments is “acceptable to God through Jesus Christ” (1 Pet 2:5). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 10, Part 2)

1 Peter 2:5, “You also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.”

5:4 *born of God* – Obedience is possible for believers, who have been regenerated and renewed by the Holy Spirit. The Word and Sacraments really do have that much power. (PBC)

Ephesians 2:1, “As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins”

Romans 3:10, “As it is written: “There is no one righteous, not even one”

Ephesians 2:9, “not by works, so that no one can boast.”

overcomes ... has overcome. To overcome the world is to gain victory over its sinful pattern of life, which is another way of describing obedience to God (v. 3). Such obedience is not impossible for the believer because he has been born again and the Holy Spirit dwells within him and gives him strength. John speaks of two aspects of victory: (1) the initial victory of turning in faith from the world to God (“has overcome”); (2) the continuing day-by-day victory of Christian living (“overcomes”). (CSB)

Believers may not feel like conquerors of the world, but, thankfully, overcoming the world depends not on our feelings or experiences but on our faith. Luther: “This must happen through faith in Christ, which is the victory. For what could this fragile vessel accomplish against Satan, the god of the world (2 Cor. 4:4)? But God is greater. He always triumphs in us through Christ. (cf. 2 Cor 2:14). Therefore all glory of victory must be ascribed to God Himself, not by any

means to us. We are far too insignificant for this. Here, however, the Word of God is required - the Word which promises and extends grace to the believers, so that when they have hurred into so many great trials and weighed down under such great and crafty spirits, they nevertheless fight their way out and triumph. But to be born of God is to believe in Jesus Christ. He who believes in Christ is now a warrior... For we are still engaged in the battle itself and are about to be victorious... God has placed us in the midst of wolves, in the kingdom of the devil. As weapons He has given us His Word and Spirit, and He tells us to do battle and to conduct ourselves as bold warriors under Him Himself as our Prince while He Himself looks on and is also victorious" (AE 30:21). (TLSB)

"For everyone born of God overcomes the world. This is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith": Jesus said, "In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world" (Jn 16:33). The world is everything that opposes Christ. "If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first" (Jn 15:18). See 1 Jn 2:15-17; 3:1, 13; 4:17. The world and its prince oppose Christ. We will be persecuted by the world because of our identity with Christ. We overcome the world because Christ overcame it and the prince of this world (Jn 12:31; 14:30; 16:11). His victory overcame the world. The victory is ours through God-given faith in him. Original language ("everyone having been begotten of God is victorious over the world") "everyone born of God overcomes the world." The victory is ours "because the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world" (1 Jn 4:4). So John can ask. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 10, Part 2)

The new birth gives us faith, which is our victory over the world. Key Easter words are *nikaō*, "be the victor, prevail, conquer, overcome" (twice in our verse), and its noun *nikē*, "victory" (only here in the NT). Jesus overcame the evil world; its prince, the devil; and sin, the cause of death. In Christ, the believer conquers as well. We know this because our faith has conquered (aorist for completed action) the world. Through faith Christ's completed victory is already ours too. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 4, Part 2)

So what is this "overcoming the world?" (PBC)

- rejoicing in the life, hope, and forgiveness we have through Christ
- staying loyal to Jesus in spite of Satan's attacks.
- resisting the devil, knowing he will have to flee (James 4:7)
- adopting God's value system instead of attractive human philosophies
- using and enjoying things without becoming materialistic
- enduring pain and hardship without despairing or becoming bitter
- rising from the dead to eternal life on judgment day

Our faith is the victory which has already overcome the world. All that is born of God overcomes the world. Our Christian faith is born of God. It is that spiritual life which was begotten in us by regeneration. Therefore faith has divine power to overcome the world. Faith overcomes all hostility, all wickedness, all lust of the world, and so faith is described as the victory that has overcome the world. (Stoeckhardt)

world. In the world sin and unrighteousness hold their sway. (Stoeckhardt)

5:5 *he that overcomes* – This is present participle which means “who continues to conquer.” This is the believer in Christ. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 4, Part 2)

Original language (“Who is the one conquering [pres. part.] the world except the one believing [pres. part.] that Jesus is the Son of God?”) “Who is it that overcomes the world? Only he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God.” It will not do to believe that Jesus is anything less. He is the Son of God and as the Son of God his blood “purifies us from all sin” (1 Jn 1:7). He is the “atoning sacrifice for our sins” (1 Jn 2:2). Only he is able to condemn the prince of this world (Jn 16:11) and give us the victory. This faith is a living, present reality (pres. part.). Note the humanity (Jesus) and the divinity (Son of God) are both united in the person of the Christ. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 10, Part 2)

Who continues to conquer (present participle) the world? Based on the previous verses, that is easy: the believer in the Christ. The three verbs are all present tense. The one who is believing is also overcoming and enjoying victory. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 4, Part 2)

When the world makes our going hard, so that we think we will have to admit defeat, then we Christians should remember that God has planted the Christian faith in our heart, which is the victory that already has overcome the world, and by this faith they will also receive strength for the last decisive battle. (Stoeckhardt)

Son of God. For parallel confessions see 2:22; 4:2; 5:1. (CSB)

Victory belongs only to those who believe that Jesus is the divine Son of God. Hus: “Peter confessed Christ to be very God and very man (Mt. 16:16). And among all the articles of faith, this one appertains most to the edification of the Church” (The Church, p. 84). (TL SB)

5:1–5 The children of God bear the family traits of their Brother, Jesus. He has faith, love, and victory over the world. The world tempts us to think of our Lord’s Commandments as a burden, too hard and too heavy for us to bear. The world seems too much for us to overcome. But our Lord Jesus has overcome the world for us. He has fulfilled all of God’s Commandments for us. He made Himself our human Brother, that through Him we might become the children of His Father and share in His great family of love. • Father, let me live in Your love through believing that Jesus is the Christ, the divine Son of God. Amen. (TL SB)

Testimony Concerning the Son of God

6 This is he who came by water and blood—Jesus Christ; not by the water only but by the water and the blood. And the Spirit is the one who testifies, because the Spirit is the truth. 7 For there are three that testify: 8 the Spirit and the water and the blood; and these three agree. 9 If we receive the testimony of men, the testimony of God is greater, for this is the testimony of God that he has borne concerning his Son. 10 Whoever believes in the Son of God has the testimony in himself. Whoever does not believe God has made him a liar, because he has not believed in the testimony that God has borne concerning his Son. 11 And this is the testimony, that God gave us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. 12 Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life.

5:6 *by water and blood*. Refers to the testimony of Jesus' Baptism and crucifixion, which revealed the love of God and accomplished His will for the salvation of the world. (TLSB)

Water symbolizes Jesus' baptism, and blood symbolizes his death. These are mentioned because Jesus' ministry began at his baptism and ended at his death. John is reacting to the heretics of his day (see Introduction: Gnosticism) who said that Jesus was born only a man and remained so until his baptism. At that time, they maintained, the Christ (the Son of God) descended on the human Jesus, but left him before his suffering on the cross—so that it was only the man Jesus who died. Throughout this letter John has been insisting that Jesus Christ is God as well as man (1:1–4; 4:2; 5:5). He now asserts that it was this God-man Jesus Christ who came into our world, was baptized and died. Jesus was the Son of God not only at his baptism but also at his death (v. 6b). This truth is extremely important, because, if Jesus died only as a man, his sacrificial atonement (2:2; 4:10) would not have been sufficient to take away the guilt of man's sin.

Here Jesus is referred to in (aorist) past tense: “the one who came” by water and blood, which most commentators agree is a reference to his Baptism and crucifixion. He was baptized into his role as the atoning Christ, and he completed his work on the cross. John's statement that he came not by water only, but also by blood, means that Jesus finished what he started. The Spirit bore public witness at Christ's Baptism, and continues to bear witness about Christ to us, so that we are witnesses of Christ to the world (Jn 15:26–27). “Truth” is frequently predicated of Christ in John's gospel (1:14, 17; 14:6; etc.) but here designates the Spirit who testifies of Christ. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 4, Part 2)

As Christ came by water and blood, so also he now comes to us through water and blood—in Baptism, which gives the new birth, and in the Lord's Supper, which sustains the faith that loves God and keeps his commands. The great importance of vv 68 to the sacramental and trinitarian theology of the early church is shown by the long addition to vv 7–8 found in the Vulgate. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 4, Part 2)

“This is the one who came by water and blood—Jesus Christ. He did not come by water only, but by water and blood.” Jesus was not only baptized with water as the Son of God, but he came “by blood.” That is he shed his blood as the Son of God. The Gnostics believed that only his phantom was crucified or that the spirit of the “Christ” left him. In view of the present influence of the New Age, it is very important to proclaim that Jesus is the Christ and the Son of God and that he, as such, shed his blood. The New Age religion believes that Jesus became the Christ and a Son of God by getting in touch with his higher “Christ consciousness.” For them Christ is not Savior but rather a model for how we too may achieve a higher “Christ consciousness.” (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 10, Part 2)

the Spirit is the one who testifies. The Holy Spirit testifies that Jesus is the Son of God in two ways: (1) The Spirit descended on Jesus at his baptism (Jn 1:32–34), and (2) he continues to confirm in the hearts of believers the apostolic testimony that Jesus' baptism and death verify that he is the Christ, the Son of God (2:27; 1Co 12:3). (CSB)

Just as Jesus is the truth, so also His Holy Spirit is the truth. The Spirit testified at the Baptism of Jesus, marking Him as the Christ who was to come and the Son of God (Jn 1:29–34). The Holy Spirit reminds every believer of all that Jesus has said (Jn 14:26). The Holy Spirit always testifies to Jesus and glorifies Jesus and guides us into all truth (Jn 16:13–14). Luther: “The water of Baptism is sanctified through the blood of Christ. Therefore it is not plain water; it is water stained with blood because of this blood of Christ which is given to us through the Word, which

brings with it the blood of Christ. And here we are said to be baptized through the blood of Christ, and thus we are cleansed from sins” (AE 30:314). (TLSB)

5:7–8 The Holy Spirit, the water of Christ’s Baptism, and the blood of His death on the cross all bear witness that this man, Jesus of Nazareth, is the Christ of Israel and the divine Son of God. (TLSB)

5:7 *three*. The OT law required “two or three witnesses” (Dt 17:6; 19:15; see 1Ti 5:19). But the addition is not found in any Greek manuscript or NT translation prior to the 16th century. (CSB)

There are three interesting interpretations for these unusual words:

1. For centuries, going clear back to St. Augustine in the 5th century, many Christians assumed that “water and blood” was an allusion to the separated fluids that ran from the pierced side of the crucified Savior. John was right there at the time, and in his biography of Jesus, John immediately points to those separated fluids as proof that Jesus Christ was really dead, proof that the OT Scriptures had been carefully fulfilled, and proof that the sacrifice for the world’s sins had really been made. He wrote: “The man who saw it [that is, John] has given testimony, and his testimony is true. He knows that he tells the truth, and he testifies so that you also may believe. These things happened so that the scripture would be fulfilled: ‘Not one of His bones will be broken,’ and, as another scripture says, ‘They will look on the one they have pierced’” (John 19:35-37) (PBC)

John’s point in our verse, then, would be to contradict the false teachers’ claim either that the death of Christ never happened or that it was only the death of Jesus but not the death of the heavenly Christ. (PBC)

2. Another interesting and scriptural possibility for the meaning of blood, water and spirit is that they are references to the means of grace – the gospel that brings Christ to us in Baptism (water), the Lord’s Supper (blood) and the Word of God (inspired by the Holy Spirit). These three things, after all, are our lifeline to Christ. This is how we know. The testimonies of the apostles and prophets are the foundation for everything we know about God. They alone bear sure witness to the creation, fall, promises, incarnation, crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension. What better way to drive doubt from our hearts than to go to the Word. (PBC)

The sacraments confirm the work of the Word that brings us to faith and keeps us in faith. The sacraments personalize the gospel in a most wondrous way. A person could read the Bible or hear a sermon and think, “That doesn’t apply to me.” There is no mistaking, however, who is meant when the water of rebirth and renewal splashes on someone’s head. There is no mistaking for whom God’s love and forgiveness are intended when the body and blood of the Lord Himself are placed right in someone’s mouth. What better way to drive doubt from our hearts than to receive the Sacred Supper? (PBC)

The Word of the prophets and apostles, first oral and then written, is the special and joyful work of the Holy Spirit, whose great mission in human history is to connect individual sinners by faith with their great Savior. Peter wrote, “Prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit” (2 Peter 1:21). Jesus promised (again in the upper room), “The spirit of truth ...

will guide you into all truth” (John 16:13). The Word and sacraments nest together perfectly – “The three are in agreement” (verse 8). (PBC)

3. There is a third possibility that appeals to many contemporary commentators. That is the words water and blood refer to the beginning and ending of Jesus public ministry. Cerinthus and other Gnostic teachers denied the two natures of Christ, claiming that the “Christ” from heaven simply came down and rested on the man Jesus during His teaching ministry. They were more interested in Jesus as a teacher of morality than as the personal sacrifice of God’s Son for the sins of the world. (PBC)

John’s reference to water, then would be to Jesus’ baptism, His anointing as our Prophet, Priest, and King in the Jordan River. At the Jordan, the Father’s voice boomed out His authentication of Jesus’ identity as His Son and His approval of the Son’s mission. The reference to blood would be to the crucifixion, where the words of Jesus and the signs and wonders that occurred at His death convinced even a Roman military officer and his execution detachment: “Surely he was the Son of God!” (Matthew 27:54). (PBC)

5:8 Luther: “The water cannot be proclaimed without the blood. Nor is the blood of Christ given without the water of Baptism. Besides, the blood and the water do not come to us except at the instance of the Holy Spirit, who is in the Word. Therefore those three cannot be separated, but the three do one thing... For these three constantly accompany one another, and through the Word a daily immersion and a perpetual Baptism takes place, a perpetual shedding of the blood of Christ and of the Holy Spirit, a continual cleansing from sins” (AE 30:315). (TLSB)

5:9 *testimony of God.* The Holy Spirit’s testimony, mentioned in vv. 6–8. (CSB)

God Himself testified to this man, Jesus of Nazareth (Mt 17:5; 2Pt 1:17). (TLSB)

Here the apostle shows with what confidence we should accept the testimony of the Gospel: If the witness of men we receive, the witness of God is greater, for this is the witness of God which He has witnessed concerning His Son. Here we again have an argument from the smaller to the greater. It is the custom among men to accept the witness of other men, unless there is good reason for suspecting trickery. The witness of God, therefore, must be infinitely more certain and credible, by as much as God is higher than any mere man. The Gospel is the testimony of God Himself concerning the salvation which was earned by His Son Jesus Christ. In holding before our eyes the fact of Christ’s baptism and of the shedding of His blood in His great Passion, the Holy Ghost, being Himself true God, gives us evidence that cannot be gainsaid that Christ redeemed the world, all men, from sin, death, and the power of the devil. (Kretzmann)
If one already receives the witness of men, then one is all the more in duty bound to receive the witness of God. So, again, the so-called inner reasons argue very strongly for the retention of the words in verses 7-8. (Stoekhardt)

5:10 *testimony in himself.* God testifies within every believer to the truth of His Word concerning His Son. (TLSB)

Whoever does not believe God has made Him a liar. Any and all who teach that Jesus is not always, and in all places, both God and man in one person are making God out to be a liar. “Absolution is the promise of the forgiveness of sins. Therefore, it necessarily requires faith.... If the heart doubts, it regards those things that God promises as uncertain and of no account” (Ap XIA 61–62). (TLSB)

Faith is essentially the acceptance and application of this fact: He that believes on the Son of God has this witness in himself; he that does not believe God has made Him a liar, because he has not believed in the witness which God has witnessed concerning His Son. Every one that believes in the Son of God has the trust, the conviction, the confidence that Jesus of Nazareth is the eternal Son of God and the Savior of the world, and that this salvation applies to the believer himself. The Holy Spirit, who lives in the heart of the believer, assures him of this fact, seals this fact in his heart through the Word of the Gospel. Just as sure as the Holy Spirit is the Truth and cannot lie, just that surely we may accept the message of our redemption through Christ. The unbelievers, on the other hand, are not only foolish, but also blasphemous, for in refusing to believe the testimony of God in the Gospel concerning His Son and the redemption through His blood, they declare God to be a liar by treating His historic testimony as unworthy of belief. (Kretzmann)

5:11 *God gave us eternal life. As a present possession. (CSB)*

John gives a summary of God's witness: And this is the witness, that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. That is the testimony of the Gospel; that is the wonderful news which we find on every page of the apostle's letter; that is the message which all the apostles proclaimed, that God has given us eternal life, that this life is a free gift of His grace and mercy. For there is nothing in us that should merit such a reward; the only reason why God has given it, why He is holding it out to all men, is His divine love in Christ Jesus; for it is in His Son that we have this eternal life, if we place our entire trust in Him, if we rely on His perfect atonement in life and in death. (Kretzmann)

The testimony is the message that God gives us eternal life in His Son, Jesus. Only those who are in His Son through faith have eternal life. There is no life outside of this God-man Jesus Christ. (TLSB)

5:12 Therefore the apostle adds: He that has the Son has life; he that has not the Son of God does not have life. We Christians, having received the message of salvation, having had it imparted to us through the Word and the Sacraments, place our trust in Jesus, the Son of God, the Savior of the world, our Redeemer. By this token we have eternal life as a definite possession. Its actual enjoyment, the bliss of seeing God face to face, is still a matter of the future, but there can be no question as to our being the possessors of the gift of eternal life. The testimony of the Gospel is too certain, too definite to admit of doubt. He who foolishly rejects the Son of God, who is also his Savior, thereby rejects eternal life and deliberately chooses everlasting death and damnation. The unbeliever has only himself to blame if he is given over to that lot which he himself preferred. (Kretzmann)

We have the Son by believing all that God has testified concerning Him. This faith is not of ourselves; it is the gift of God (Eph. 2:8-9). We possess the gift of eternal life now by believing in Jesus. (TLSB)

5:6–12 The testimony of the apostles, the life of Jesus, and the work of the Spirit testify that God has given us life in His Son. This testimony is in stark contradiction to all who teach that God's Son did not suffer in the flesh or that He comes to us apart from the flesh of His humanity. • Heavenly Father, let us abide forever in Christ and never doubt the testimony You have given about Your beloved Son. Amen. (TLSB)

That You May Know

13 I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life. 14 And this is the confidence that we have toward him, that if we ask anything according to his will he hears us. 15 And if we know that he hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests that we have asked of him. 16 If anyone sees his brother committing a sin not leading to death, he shall ask, and God[a] will give him life—to those who commit sins that do not lead to death. There is sin that leads to death; I do not say that one should pray for that. 17 All wrongdoing is sin, but there is sin that does not lead to death. 18 We know that everyone who has been born of God does not keep on sinning, but he who was born of God protects him, and the evil one does not touch him. 19 We know that we are from God, and the whole world lies in the power of the evil one. 20 And we know that the Son of God has come and has given us understanding, so that we may know him who is true; and we are in him who is true, in his Son Jesus Christ. He is the true God and eternal life. 21 Little children, keep yourselves from idols.

5:13–21 Like the Gospel of John, this Letter closes with a statement of purpose (Jn 21:24–25). (TLSB)

5:13 *that you may know.* Knowing this gives us confidence before God and boldness before men. (TLSB)

Another statement of the letter's purpose (see 2:26). (CSB)

The letter is finished, and the apostle now speaks his closing words, summarizing the principal points which he made in the body of the epistle: These things I wrote you in order that you might know that you have eternal life, since you believe in the name of the Son of God. The apostle is referring to everything that he wrote in this letter. His entire discussion had the aim and object of confirming the readers who have centered their faith in Jesus Christ, the Son of God, as their Savior, in the knowledge that they thereby were the possessors of eternal life. Faith has nothing in common with doubt and uncertainty, it is not a matter of personal opinion and feeling; it is glorious, certain knowledge based upon the Word of the Gospel. We know that we have eternal life through faith because the Scripture tells us so. (Kretzmann)

The purpose of all the Scriptures is to strengthen the faith of Christians, reassuring them of the prize of eternal salvation. Christians are to draw spiritual nourishment from the Scripture again and again, so that their faith may increase and they be fortified against all temptations of life. All Christian doctrine seeks to nourish and promote the Christian faith. And that will, then, of itself promote Christian sanctification. (Stoeckhardt)

5:14 *if we ask anything according to his will.* For another condition for prayer see 3:21–22. (CSB)

And this faith has another effect in us: And this is the boldness which we have toward Him, that, if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. The prayers of the believers, the real prayers, are always heard, they never return unanswered. This cheerful assurance, this frank boldness, we hold. We enter into the very presence of the Lord with the calm certainty that our petitions will be heard as we make them in faith, in firm reliance upon the sonship which was given to us in Christ. It is self-evident that we, as children of God, will ask only such things as are in accordance with the will of our heavenly Father. In other words, we leave the answering of our prayers in His hands, knowing that His wisdom and mercy always find a way to give us what is

best for us, regardless of the form in which we clothe our petitions. Note that His promise is not to grant all that we ask, but to hearken to our prayers: He answers in His own way. (Kretzmann)

God knows how to give good gifts to His children (Lk 11:13). We do not always know what to ask, but His will is always for our salvation and for the salvation of all. (TLSB)

5:15 God will give whatever we ask if it is good for our salvation and the salvation of our brother. This is esp true whenever we pray for others. (TLSB)

This assurance should influence our entire attitude toward God: And if we know that He hearkens to whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests which we asked of Him. God always listens to the prayers of His children, reading their content even better than they intend it. We are sure of obtaining our requests, that which we are in need of, probably not always as our petition was worded, but always as it was best for us, and as we should have offered our prayer had we been wiser. Prayer is not a dictation to God to do thus and so, but a statement of our needs as we see them. And it is our heavenly Father who gives us more than our short-sightedness permitted us to know. If we have reached this point in our Christian knowledge, then our relation toward our heavenly Father will be unclouded by any lack of trust in Him. (Kretzmann)

The Apostle referred to prayer in general as an evidence of faith. Now he turns his attention to a specific kind of prayer, intercessory prayer. He has called the attention of his readers to the various parts which essentially belong to the Christian life. Several times he has spoken of prayer, but never of intercessory prayer. He wants his Christians to know that they should prove their love also in praying for their brother. (Stoeckhardt)

5:16 Verses 16–17 illustrate the kind of petition we can be sure God will answer (see vv. 14–15). (CSB)

sin that leads to death.† In the context of this letter directed against Gnostic teaching, which denied the incarnation and threw off all moral restraints, it is probable that the “sin that leads to death” refers to the Gnostics’ adamant and persistent denial of the truth and to their shameless immorality. This kind of unrepentant and persistent sin is a sin against the Holy Spirit and leads to spiritual death. (CSB)

Any unrepented sin can lead to death (cf. v. 17). But if a believer is open to repentance and to God’s forgiveness, his sins will not lead to death. (TLSB)

give him life - God will grant forgiveness of sins and life to the brother for whom we pray. (Cf. James 5:20). (TLSB)

sin that leads to death - The idolatry of the false teachers. Misunderstanding of this passage led to a false teaching that are seven deadly or “mortal,” sins (pride, covetousness, lust, envy, gluttony, anger, sloth) in contrast to “venial,” or forgiveable sins. All sin is damnable. God forgives all who repent. (TLSB)

not say that one should pray for that - If one refuses to repent and confess Jesus as the Christ and the Son of God, there is no point in asking God to forgive that person who stands condemned by his own stubborn unbelief and refusal of God’s love (John 3:18, 36). (TLSB)

5:17 *all wrongdoing is sin* - Any sins could lead to death if not for the Gospel, which is our victory over sin, death, and the world. The children of God repent of all sin. They hate their sin and the weakness of their flesh. But when believers fall into sin, they know that they have One who prays for them and offers forgiveness to them (2:1-2). Cf. v. 16. (TLSB)

5:18–20 *We know*. The letter ends with three striking statements, affirming the truths that “we know” and summarizing some of the letter’s major themes. (CSB)

5:18 *everyone who was born of God*. Jesus, the Son of God. (CSB)

God protects him - If we abide in His Word, Jesus remains in us and guards us from the evil one, so that the devil cannot touch us. Jesus cast out demons simply by the power of His Word. Luther: “This is a strange thought. The same man sins, and at the same time he does not sin. It is here that those two statements of the apostle John are brought into harmony. The first is found in 1 John 1:8: ‘If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves’; the second occurs in 1 John 3:9 and 5:18: ‘No one born of God commits sin.’ All the saints, therefore, have sin and are sinners; yet no one of them sins. They are righteous in accordance with the fact that grace has worked healing in them; they are sinners in accordance with the fact that they still must be healed” (AE 27:372). (TLSB)

5:19 *the whole lies in the power of the evil one*-All unbelievers are under the dominion and control of Satan (Eph. 2:1-3). But God has rescued us (Col. 1:13; Acts 26:18). (TLSB)

5:20 *given us understanding* - Jesus gives understanding of the Scriptures. Jesus gives understanding to know God because He reveals God to us (John 1:18). (TLSB)

who is true. God the Father. (CSB)

Literally, “the genuine one”; i.e., Jesus, who is the true and genuine Christ and Savior (in contrast to the false christs taught by the spirit of the Antichrist). (TLSB)

He is the true God. Could refer to either God the Father or God the Son. (CSB)

A clear statement that Jesus is divine and that eternal life is given through Him. (TLSB)

eternal life. The letter began with this theme (1:1–2) and now ends with it. (CSB)

5:21 *idols*. False gods, as opposed to the one true God (v. 20). (CSB)

The whole point of John’s Letter. We have the genuine Christ and Savior by believing that Jesus is God the Son in the flesh. He is the true God and eternal life. Any teaching that presents Jesus as one who is not both true God and true man in one person actually present an idol. Likewise, any teaching that denies that Jesus is the Savior of all mankind, purely by God’s grace alone, also presents an idol. Cf. Acts 15:20, 29; 21:25; Gal. 5:19-20; 1 Cor. 5:10; 6:9; Eph. 5:5; Col. 3:5. (TLSB)

5:13–21 Knowing that we have eternal life in Jesus gives us confidence to ask for anything, and we can be certain that we shall receive what we ask according to God’s will, especially when we pray for our brother for Jesus’ sake. All wrongdoing is sin, and any sin could lead to death if not for the Righteous One, Jesus Christ, who cleanses us from all sin by His blood. Not only can we be confident of our own forgiveness in Him who is the genuine Savior and the true God, but we

can also pray even for our brother who sins and be certain that God desires his repentance and life because of Jesus. • Son of God, protect us from the evil one, and keep us from every idol. Amen.
(TLS14B)