

#### Handout: 1 John Lesson 4

In Chapter 5, John returns to the central theme of his letter: the unshakable bond of love between God and His children, begotten by Him in the Sacrament of Baptism, and who obey His commandments. In addition to what he wrote in chapter 3 concerning the command to believe in the Son of God (3:23-24), John offers four more variations of this call in chapter 5:

- *Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ is begotten by God, and everyone who loves the father loves also the one begotten by him. (5:1).*
- *Who indeed is the victor over the world but the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God (5:5)?*
- *Whoever believes in the Son of God has this testimony within himself. Whoever does not believe God has made him a liar by not believing the testimony God has given about his Son (5:10).*
- *I write these things to you so that you may know that you have eternal life, you who believe in the name of the Son of God (5:13).*

*4b And the victory that conquers the world is our faith [pistis]. 5 Who indeed is the victor over the world but the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?*

The phrase in 5:4b is the only occurrence of the noun “faith” (pistis) in both the Gospel of John and the three Letters. John usually uses the verb “believe” (pisteuo) to describe the act of believing (98 times in his Gospel and 9 times in 1 John). John writes the victory that conquers the world is Christian faith.

Jesus commanded the disciples and all Christians of every generation in the Gospel of John 16:33 when He said, “Be courageous!” We can be courageous because, in the same verse, Jesus said: “I have conquered the world!” Jesus conquered the power of the world over humanity by His self-sacrificial death on the altar of the Cross (Jn 16:33; 1 Jn 2:1-2). Jesus instructed St. John to write in His letters to the seven churches in the Book of Revelation, through our faith in Christ Jesus, Christians share in His victory over sin and the world by receiving His gift of eternal salvation:

- *“To the victor, I will give the right to eat from the tree of life that is in the garden of God (Rev 2:7).*
- *“The victor shall not be harmed by the second death” (Rev 2:11).*
- *“To the victor, I shall give some of the hidden manna; I shall give a white amulet upon which is inscribed a new name, which no one knows except the one who receives it” (Rev 2:17).*
- *“To the victor, who keeps to my ways until the end, I will give authority over the nations” (Rev 2:26).*
- *“The victor will thus be dressed in white, and I will never erase his name from the Book of Life but will acknowledge his name in the presence of my Father and of his angels” (Rev 3:5).*
- *“The victor I will make into a pillar in the Temple of my God, and he will never leave it again. On him, I will inscribe the name of my God and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem, which comes down out of heaven from my God, as well as my new name” (Rev 3:12).*
- *“I will give the victor the right to sit with me on my throne, as I myself first won the victory and sit with my Father on his throne” (Rev 3:21).*

5:7 *So there are three that testify [in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost. And these three are one. And there are three that give testimony on earth], 8 the Spirit, the water, and the blood, and the three are of one accord.* The words in the brackets are called the “Johannine Comma,” from the Latin translation of the Douay Rheims Bible translated into English and other older translations of the Letter of 1 John, including the old King James Version. Most modern scholars believe this was a phrase inserted into the manuscripts of 1 John in the Western Church sometime in the later fourth or early fifth centuries. It does not change the meaning of verses 7-8 except to clarify that the three witnesses include the three persons of the Most Holy Trinity and places them “in heaven” in parallel to the three witnesses to Christ on earth. John wants those who receive his Letter to connect verses 6-8 not only with Jesus’ baptism but also with His death when He breathed out His Spirit upon the earth (Jn 19:30), and water and blood flowed from His pierced side, imaging the Sacraments of Baptism and the Eucharist. The three: the Holy Spirit, water (baptism), and blood (Eucharist), symbolize the birth of the New Covenant Church.

5:16 *If anyone sees his brother sinning, if the sin is not deadly, he should pray to God, and he will give him life. This is only for those whose sin is not deadly. There is such a thing as deadly sin, about which I do not say that you should pray. 17 All wrongdoing is sin, but there is sin that is not deadly.*

Since God commands us to love our brothers and sisters in the Church family and those in the human family, we pray for those who are in sin. However, more than our prayers are necessary for those trapped in what John calls “deadly” sin. He is making a distinction between venial and mortal sin that can cost a person his or her eternal salvation. Under the New Covenant in Christ, mortal sins require the Sacrament of Reconciliation for forgiveness. It is from 1 John 5:16-17 and Numbers 15:30-31 that the Church differentiates between venial and mortal/deadly sin (deadly sin is a sin that can cause spiritual death and eternal separation from God).

- CCC 1854: “Sins are rightly evaluated according to their gravity. The distinction between mortal and venial sins, already evident in Scripture, became part of the tradition of the Church. It is corroborated by human experience.”
- CCC 1855: “Mortal sin destroys charity in the heart of man by a grave violation of God’s law; it turns man away from God, who is his ultimate end and his beatitude, by preferring an inferior good to him. Venial sin allows charity to subsist, even though it offends and wounds it.”
- CCC 1856: “Mortal sin, by attacking the vital principle within us that is charity, necessitates a new initiative of God’s mercy and a conversion of heart which is normally accomplished within the setting of the Sacrament of Reconciliation...”
- CCC 1857: “For a sin to be mortal, three conditions must together be met: ‘Mortal sin is sin whose object is a grave matter and which is also committed with full knowledge and deliberate consent.’”
- CCC 1858: “Mortal sin requires full knowledge and complete consent. It presupposes knowledge of the sinful character of the act, of its opposition to God’s law. It also implies a consent sufficiently deliberate to be a personal choice. Feigned ignorance and hardness of heart do not diminish, but rather increase, the voluntary character of sin.”