Overcoming Love

## Listening to the Apostle of Love

## By Steve Viars

**Bible Text:** 1 John 5:1-12

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Isn't it amazing how even a few sounds from a song can immediately bring back memories or evoke strong emotions? You know the kind of songs I'm talking about? Let's test that theory. (Theme from Rocky) Dance if you want to. It's amazing, I could even hear from Faith West people responding to that one and undoubtedly it reminded you of that guy right there. Or that guy right there. You can almost hear him saying, "Yo Adrian." That's the best I've got, "Yo. Yo, Adrian." One of the concepts that song calls up is that of being an overcomer, right? Or of being a victor. You may remember this classic scene from Rocky II where the song is actually played again. It kind of makes you want to jump up and down, doesn't it? Or maybe punch your neighbor. Feel free if you've just got one that's got to come out. Why did I let you listen to that and show you that? Well, I want you to think about metaphors this morning. You know, the word of God uses dozens and dozens of different metaphors to describe people who have chosen to become followers of Jesus Christ and each one of them is given to help us think about our identity, to help us think about our role and our function in the world in which we've been placed. Metaphors, for example, we're called children of light in Ephesians 5:8. That's one way of thinking about yourself. Or a totally different way, sons of the kingdom in Matthew 13:38. We're called sheep in John 10. We're called soldiers in Philippians 2. Paul called us ambassadors in 2 Corinthians 5. Or salt of the earth in that famous text in the Sermon on the Mount. Peter referred to us as aliens and strangers and that's honestly, that's just the beginning of the list because the Lord wants us to have a thorough understanding of who we are and how we fit into his plan and program now on this earth and in the days ahead.

Now, what does that have to do with the Rocky theme song? Well, one of the concepts God uses is the word "nikao," think swoosh which means "overcome" or "overcomer" and God wants you to see yourself as an overcomer. Interestingly, of the 28 times that one of the forms of that word is used in the New Testament, 24 of them are from the writings of the Apostle John and especially as we move into his three epistles, his letters. Think about that, we know that the pressure and the persecution on followers of Jesus Christ is increasing so naturally you have the question of, "Well, how should Christians view themselves in an increasingly hostile world that rejects or ridicules the person and work of Christ and his word? And one of John's answers is as a nikao, as an overcomer. In fact, the Apostle Paul went so far as to say, Romans 8:37, "But in all these things we overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us." That phrase "overwhelmingly conquer" is actually an intensified use of the word I'm talking to you about right now, it's hupernikao. You could probably transplant that, huh? Hupernikao, absolutely, completely victorious.

So Scripture promises us that if you know Christ as Savior and Lord, you will overcome the world. Think of yourself as an overcomer. Now you might say, "Wait, wait, wait, wait, how could these words have possibly applied to men and women in John's day who were being hounded by false teachers who believed that Jesus didn't really die on the cross for their sins? How could you overcome that kind of false teaching?" Or far worse, "How could those words in that day have possibly applied to people who were being martyred for their faith because of the ongoing persecution of the church? How could you view yourself as a nikao in the middle of that?" Or thread it up to today. I've been gone the last couple of weeks and what did you allow to happen in this state while I was gone? Well, the Supreme Court made a decision or in this case decided not to make a decision that essentially legalizes gay marriage in our state which based on our understanding of Scripture, moves our culture one more step away from viewing God's word as having any place whatsoever in the establishment of societal norms in this country. We're living at a time in history quite similar to the description given at the end of the book of Judges and in case you don't understand that book, this is not a compliment, where every man did that which was right in his own eyes. Or described in Romans chapter 1, where God in his judgmental wrath and if you say, "Well, I don't have a place in my heart for a God who would ever practice judgmental wrath and whatever God you're worshiping is not the God of the Bible," I have to love you enough to tell you that because Romans 1 is really clear that God in his judgmental wrath gives people over to their own degrading passions typified in this community, are you talking about Californian now? No, no, no, I'm talking about here. Typified in this community by the murderous Cody Cousins who explained his brutal treatment of fellow student Andrew Bolt with the shockingly frank words, "I killed him because I wanted to and I always do what I want." There's an ethical standard for the ages but at least he was honest enough to say it, huh? Because if that's not the right way to live, every man does that which is right in his own eyes, if that is not right, then how in the world do you possibly decide why it's wrong?

So the Supreme Court's decision not to decide leaves people like us both as individuals and as a church in a rather interesting predicament. Let's just talk about it, don't be nervous. Just relax. Take a pill if necessary but let's just talk about what does this mean? Well, for example, what do you do when a coworker invites you to the wedding of their gay child? Do you go or do you not go? What do you do as a business person, you're a florist or whatever and a gay couple wants you to provide flowers or cakes or pictures for their wedding? Do you do that or do you not do that? What if a member of this church wants to have a gay wedding at this church? And if the answer to that question is, "We would not do that," are we prepared to face the legal and societal consequences of answering that way? Unless you think that that's just exaggeration, you understand that five pastors in Houston this week had the local prosecutor's office demand copies of their sermons and emails regarding this topic. So welcome to life in this world. Maybe it would be better to look the other way on this issue because otherwise we'll be labeled as being hateful or bigoted or intolerant. What happens if Bible-believing churches actually become smaller over time because the up and coming generation would not want to face the societal pressure in whatever form that might take from being associated with a Bible believing church?

You understand, that's just the beginning of the list of questions that I could pose to you this morning. So what do we do? How do we view ourselves? Should we be filled with fear? Is that what God wants you to see when you look in the mirror in the morning, a person who is filled with fear because of what is occurring in the kingdom of man? Or should we be filled with anger. Hey, should you get kind of a scowl on your face and go down to Meyer and scowl at somebody. Is that it? Should we organize a political party and take this nation back? What are we supposed to see when we look in the mirror? Here is one of the central biblical answers to that question: we're supposed to see a group of overcomers and cue the Rocky theme song. Nikaos, we're supposed to see a group of overcomers but I believe that seldom in any of our lifetimes has it been more important to think carefully about, "Now, exactly what does that mean? And exactly what does it not mean?"

With that in mind, open your Bible now to 1 John 5, that's on page 187 of the back section of the Bible under the chair in front of you. Aren't you glad for a book that gives us direction for how to live every day? Absolutely. We're starting to land the plane on this verse-by-verse exposition of the epistle of 1 John. We've been calling this "Listening to the Apostle of Love." If you've been with us for this study, you will understand after all of the emphasis in this book on love why John would have that nickname. We also thought this would be an ideal book to go along with our annual theme of "Loving Our Neighbors" because there is so much practical truth in this book about how to love those that the Lord has placed around us. Now here's the plan: the plan is to work on the first half of chapter 5 this morning and then, Lord willing, to deal with the delightful verses at the end of the book next Sunday which some of you know, contain one of my favorite verses in all the Bible. So I'm already wound up about preaching next Sunday and it's still this Sunday but that's going to be delightful as well. Then we plan to move into stewardship month during the first four Sundays of November and this year, because it's the 50th anniversary of our church, did you know that? We probably ought to say something about that. We're going to talk about the stewardship of our heritage during the month of November and I'm looking forward to studying a number of things with you about that as well.

Now, for our purposes this morning, I really think you would agree with me that there is no more critical time during the lifetimes of any of us where we need to think very carefully about how we're supposed to relate to the world in which we live. Well, follow along carefully to the argument that we find beginning in 1 John 5:1 where John says,

1 Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God [every one of those words is crucial] and whoever loves the Father loves the child born of Him. [Who would that be?] 2 By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and observe His commandments. 3 For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments; and His commandments are not burdensome. [Do you agree with that? His commandments are not burdensome.] 4 For whatever is born of God [here you go] overcomes the world; and this is the victory that has overcome the world [the second time, nikao] - our faith. 5 Who is the one who overcomes [third time] the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God? 6 This is the One who came by water and blood, Jesus Christ; not with the water only, but with the water and with the blood. It is the Spirit 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 the three are in agreement. 9 If we receive the testimony of men, the testimony of God is greater; for the testimony of God is this, that He has testified concerning His Son. 10 The one who believes in the Son of God has the testimony in himself; the one who does not believe God has made Him a liar, because he has not believed in the testimony that God has given concerning His Son. 11 And the testimony is this, that God has given us eternal life, [there's some great news, huh? There is something beyond the kingdom of man] and this life is in His Son. 12 He who has the Son has the life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have the life.

We're talking this morning about overcoming love. You saw that word, nikao, three times in this text, overcoming love. With the time we have remaining, let's look for four characteristics of people who possess that. What does it take? What is required? What is involved in having overcoming love? Well, for one thing for sure at the early part of the text, the genuineness of your faith in Christ. Now, you'll notice today that I'm going to use the possessive pronoun "your" on the assumption that there has been a definite time in your life where you've acknowledged your sin and then you placed your faith and trust in the Gospel, the good news of the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ. I realize that some who will hear this message today would not be able to say that yet. Maybe you wouldn't even want to say that about yourself. Well, if that's the case, I'm glad you're here. I want you to know that. I prayed specifically for persons to be in this service today who have not yet placed their faith and trust in Christ so I'm glad you're here. There are some things in this text that very well God could use to draw you to himself. I hope that happens today. I would also save this that if you say, "No, I'm going to dig in my heels and I'm going to reject Christ." Speaking of metaphors, there are quite a few metaphors that God's word would use to describe a person who was going to reject his Son and I would be more than happy to talk with you personally and privately about what God's word would say about that condition if you would want to have that conversation.

But what does John tell us in this text it means to have genuine faith as part of overcoming love? Well, faith in what? Faith in part that he's the promised Messiah. That's the point of the beginning of verse 1, "Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ." You see, every person has to decide what he or she is going to believe about the biblical message of Jesus but keep this in mind, that God has never asked anybody to exercise blind faith or objectless faith. That's why Peter said it like this, "For we did not follow cleverly devised tales," why would he have staked his life on that? "We did not follow cleverly devised tales when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of His majesty," Peter said. "For when He received honor and glory from God the Father," this is talking about the Mount of Transfiguration, "such an utterance as this was made to Him by the Majestic Glory, 'This is My beloved Son with whom I am well-pleased' - and we ourselves heard this utterance," Peter said, "made from heaven when we were with Him on the holy mountain. So we have the prophetic word made more sure, to which you do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star arises in your hearts. But know this first of all," do you know this? "That no prophecy of Scripture is a matter of one's own interpretation, for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God."

John made the exact same argument you may recall at the beginning of this epistle we're studying this fall when he said to us, "What was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands, concerning the Word of Life - and the life was manifested, and we have seen and testify and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was manifested to us - what we have seen and heard that's what we're proclaiming to you." That was their uniform testimony that when they compared what the Old Testament said about the coming Messiah, about the Redeemer, about the Christ, and then they carefully examined the birth and the life and the teaching and the death and the burial and the resurrection and the ascension of Jesus Christ, they could come to no other logical conclusion than that he was truly the promised Messiah on whom they should, in fact they must, place their faith and trust and hope.

That was far different. You say, "Why did he make such an emphasis?" A couple of reasons. One, it was far different than the false teachers of that day who were eventually known as the Gnostics because they believed they had special knowledge. The Greek word gnosis, that's where their name came from. They believed they had special knowledge which proposed that matter was evil. Now stay with me, there is an ethical response to all this that is breathtakingly relevant to where we live today as a culture. But the Gnostics believed that all matter was evil, therefore, the Spirit of Christ only came on Jesus after his baptism and then left him before he went to the cross. Why? Because it would have been unspiritual they thought for the Son of God to actually be born into a human body, matter, and equally unspiritual for the Son of God to be crucified on a cross and die. Now, that kind of makes us scratch our heads until you think through the ethical consequences of that heresy. If matter is evil, then your so-called God doesn't care about what you do with your body so you can say you're a spiritual person and still be in love with the world. Remember the world system, we're talking this morning about overcoming the world in 1 John 5. Well, that's understood in context of what was said back in 1 John 2:15-17, the world system comprised of "the lust of the eyes and the lust of the flesh and the boastful pride of life." It's amazing how we have a very similar heresy taking over our country and there are plenty of examples of that right here in our own community of people who say, "You can be spiritual. You can even know God but you can do what you want to do with your own body even if it violates the clear dictates of Scripture." And John says "Nope. No, no, no. We've examined what the Old Testament says about the person and work of the coming Messiah and we have nikaoed the world. We have overcome the world with our faith in Jesus as the Christ, as the promised Messiah of Israel. Other people can believe what they want to believe and act how they want to act and someday they will stand before God but we have," John says, "overcome the world by our faith."

John goes on to say, "When that happens you've been born of God." And he very likely has Jesus' discussion with Nicodemus in mind here which was recorded in one of the best-known chapters in the Bible, the Gospel of John, chapter 3. You remember this? "Now there was a man of the Pharisees, named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews; this man came to Jesus by night and said to Him, 'Rabbi, we know that You have come from God as a teacher; for no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with him.' Jesus answered and said to him, 'Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is,'" what? "'Born again.'" It's not something Jimmy Carter came up with, okay? Jesus is the one who came up with that. You "'cannot see the kingdom of God.'" Before that conversation is over, Jesus was saying to Nicodemus one of the best-known verses in the Bible, "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life," because you have experienced the new birth in Christ. That's always going to be the core issue. What do you believe about Jesus? John said this at the end of his Gospel, "Therefore, many other signs Jesus also performed in the presence of his disciples which were not written in this book but these have been written so that you may," get mad at the world? Start a political action committee? Try to take over the kingdom of man by force? No, "so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God and that believing you may have life in his name."

We're talking about admitting that you need a Savior and a Lord and John says that when you make that decision and, friend, I hope you have, and if you have not, I hope you will today, Scripture says you're given new life. You are regenerated. You are born again. You become a new creation and this text says this, "That faith, your faith is the victory that overcomes the world." Verse 4, "For whatever is born of God overcomes the world; and this is the victory that has overcome the world - our faith." Now, how so? How is that true that your faith helps you overcome the world? How and where? At the ballot box? Is that it? We're all overcomers and our candidates, whoever they are, are going to win in a couple of weeks. Seriously? On the Supreme Court? The same court, by the way, that rendered a generation ago that abortion was acceptable? In the world of public opinion, is that where we overcome? Of course not. Christ's kingdom is not of this world in the sense that his followers are called to impose biblical truth on unbelieving people by force. Remember, we learned several weeks ago that you have to think this through logically and exegetically. We learned several weeks ago when we were studying 1 John 2:15 to 17, love not the world, that the word "world" is used three different ways in the Bible. Sometimes it's talking about the globe, the physical earth. Often it's talking about the world of people, the men and women around us, "for God so loved the world." Thirdly and frequently, it's talking about the world system, philosophies, our world's way of interpreting life and living life apart from God and his word. In 1 John 2:15 when God says, "love not the world," John is talking about the third definition. Well, the exact same thing is true here. We talk about overcoming the world and we're not talking about condemning people who choose to live outside of allegiance to Christ as defined in Scripture. I mean, how else would you expect people in the kingdom of man to live? What happened recently with the Supreme Court, what is happening in our culture, should not be surprising to any of us but Scripture tells us this: we've been rescued from that. There's some good news, huh? From the domain of darkness. Do you understand that's a kingdom too? That's the kingdom of man, for he rescued us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son which is why the Apostle Paul would say that our citizenship is in heaven from which we also eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ.

So what does that mean? So in what sense then do we overcome the world? Well, in this conversation about sexuality, our focus is on exercising our sexuality and everything else about us in a way that avoids the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life. Why? Why? You overcome the world because Jesus Christ is in charge of your life and you are joyfully submitting every aspect of who you are to him. And what that means and there will be all sorts of men and woman who will come into our campuses today and hear this message who will be able to say that they have allowed Jesus Christ to help them live in sexual purity this week because of their faith in him and when they looked in the mirror this morning, I hope they didn't have some kind of a frown on their face because of something that is happening in the kingdom of man. I hope they didn't have some kind of a hateful look of anger on their face because of some Supreme Court decision. I hope they're rejoicing in what their faith in Christ is helping them do and as a result, I hope playing in their head was something like (Theme from Rocky). Feel free to box in the air a little bit or dance around a little bit because that's exactly what we're talking about. We're talking about thinking about ourselves as overcomers. "Yo, Adrian." The genuineness of your faith has become the victory that overcomes the world which is a far better way to live than "every man does that which is right in his own eyes."

Now, what's the second characteristic according to this text? It's the sincerity of your love for others. Now, follow the argument of this verse very carefully, "Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God," we talked about that. Now he goes on to say, "and whoever loves the Father loves the child born of Him." Now, lock on to that. Who is the child born of him? Well, you might say that's talking about Jesus. You love Jesus. But we all believe we ought to love Jesus but that's not the point of this verse. The child who is born of him is defined by what was just said, "whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God." We're talking about fellow Christians. That's why the next verse says, "By this we know that we love the children of God." So come back to the main point, the idea here is that God can help you overcome the world's central attribute, selfishness. One of the ways you overcome the world is by letting your new birth, by allowing your regeneration, your redemption, help you slay the dragon of selfishness and choose to love those the Lord has placed around you. You overcome.

You see, think about the people who walked into the nursery this morning. I mean, who are they? Do you want me to cue the Rocky song again? Maybe we ought to play that at the beginning of every nursery rotation. I hope that's not on video. But you understand what I'm talking about. Think about the hundreds and hundreds of people who have served week-in and week-out in order to keep all of our ministries chugging along around here. You see, they are overcomers because they love others more than they love themselves. Think about our deacons and their families. Think about the men who are allowing their names to be considered for the position of deacon this fall. The examples are endless. You see, we're not sitting around and talking about how bad the world might be. Our job is not to stand in condemnation of the kingdom of man. But one of the reasons for that is we're too busy enjoying the fact that God has given us new life in Christ and so we can joyfully love the people that God has placed around us. Friends, that love is powerful. That love is infectious.

I mentioned I have been traveling a lot this week and because our son, Andrew, is not able to travel very well, that means that many times I'm away from Chris and Andrew if I'm traveling on behalf of the church somewhere. This is a picture of our son, Drew, and I threw in a little picture of my grandson because you just needed that. It has absolutely nothing to do with this message but that's Liam, the finest looking grandson on the face of the planet. But anyway, I digress. Anyway, there's Drew and if you've been around our church you know that Drew loves bears. That would be the understatement of the day. Drew loves bears. Drew loves to be called bear. Drew likes to talk about bears. And the best present in all the world for Drew is another stuffed bear. You might say, "But how many does he already have?" That question is completely irrelevant. Okay, what does that have to do with anything? There is always room for another bear and if we eventually have to build another addition to our house to contain all the bears, so be it. So when I came back to my office, someone had been loving enough to leave this on my desk. It was a bag for Bear and you can pretty much guess what's inside that bag is yet another beautiful stuffed bear. Well, here's how Drew responded when he opened it. "It's a bear! It's a bear!" By the way, that's his made up language. That's too complicated for this sermon either.

What I'm saying, just think about that: what was that? Cue the Rocky music. That's what it's like to be part of a family of people who are overcoming the world. In this point of the discussion, the world's emphasis on the primacy of self, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life, by nikaoing that, by overcoming that, you're placed in a position to truly love others. Our church is not all wound up about what's occurring in the kingdom of man. We're not all wound up about what the Supreme Court did. We'll pray for the election, we'll vote, but that's not where the primacy of our focus and passion goes. We're fired up about getting ready for the Living Nativity which is why everybody here is going to sign up for the Living Nativity today before you leave because you are saved. So, we're fired up about the Living Nativity and we're fired up about Christmas for Everyone and we're fired up about our Christmas Eve services on both of our campuses this year and our New Year's Eve spectacular and all the Christmas ministries to the kids who live around our parishes, etc. etc. What are we all about? We're all about loving those God has placed around us and we're so glad that we have been given new life in Christ so that we can choose to live that way.

Scripture teaches us that Christ frees us up to love everybody around us especially those of the household of faith. That's what Paul meant. "Let us do good to all people, especially to those of the house hold of faith." So why are we all into this community-based outreach ministry? Why are we doing so much work downtown? It's because we have been chosen to be overcomers of the world of selfishness ultimately because of the power of the Gospel.

That's where the latter half of this text comes in. "This is the One who came by water and blood, Jesus Christ." Well, why is that so important? Because the power of our sin had to be broken, friends. That's why we don't stand in judgment of everybody else around us. We're still amazed that God was willing to deliver us from our sin by the power of the blood of his Son. The power of our sin had to be broken. The penalty of our sin had to be removed. That's the only way we could possibly love this way and that takes all of our passion and all of our energy.

Now, throw this next point from the text on the pile and then I realize, "You've raised some questions at the beginning that you'd better answer." I'm going to. Give the old man a break. But John also talks about the joyfulness of our obedience. He says, "For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments," now hear this, "and His commandments are not burdensome." Do you believe that? Many people don't. They want to live by what is right in their own eyes but if you're a follower of Jesus Christ, you have decided that his commandments are not burdensome. In fact, I would suggest that's a key step in your maturity when you can open Christ in his power and truly believe his way is best. You start sounding like the Psalmist, "O how I love your law. It's my meditation all the day." Was that true of the way you lived this past week? If so, (Rocky Theme). It doesn't sound as well when I just... Or Psalm 119:114, "You are my hiding place and my shield; I wait," here it is, "I wait for Your word or your testimonies are wonderful, therefore, my soul observes them."

That's what John means when he says that a person growing and overcoming does not consider the commandments of God to be burdensome. James said it like this, "One who looks intently at the perfect law," the law of what? Fascinating juxtaposition of ideas. "The law of liberty." You see, that kind of faith, it overcomes the world. But when you have that view of the word, you have that view of Christ where you want to joyfully obey him, that kind of faith overcomes the world. I mentioned this word "overcome" several times as the Greek word nikao. You might say, "That reminds me of another cultural metaphor." Yup, that one right there. I'll probably get sued for putting that on the screen but that one right there. You see, the Greeks had a goddess of victory named what? Yeah, Nike, derived from the same word who supposedly aided Zeus in his battle against the Titans. That's the word that John used to help you think about you. John MacArthur said this of this concept, "Against that pagan backdrop, it was stunning for the New Testament to assign to Christians the invincibility associated only with the gods."

So what about these questions I posed earlier? Based on this recent Supreme Court decision, what does overcoming look like for us? Well, if it's clearly a biblical issue regarding the way those of us who say we have placed our faith and trust in Jesus Christ and therefore are part of the kingdom of God are going to live, there's no question about that because inside the church house, right, that's different, inside the church house where we're trying to live out the dictates of the kingdom of heaven, obedience to Scripture always wins regardless of the price we might have to pay. You say, "What about sex?" Don't get worried that the preacher said sex. God created sex, okay? And he said that when it's exercised within the boundaries of monogamous marriage it's good. You could even say amen to that if you wanted to but I realize... That's why we encourage married people to enjoy themselves. Enjoy it. Enjoy themselves sexually in ways that are passionate and aggressive and pleasing to one another.

But the same Bible that teaches that also teaches that any kind, and hear that, any kind of sexual expression outside monogamous marriage between one man and one woman displeases God and therefore it should never be named among Bible-believing Christians. So what if we had a member of this church, somebody who said they were part of the kingdom of God yet who said that, "I am also a practicing homosexual and I want to have a gay marriage in this church." That will never happen. Now, understand the difference: it's highly likely that we have a number of members of this church who would say that, at least we have some members of this church who would say that, "I from time to time have same sex attraction." That's not the issue here, your attractions. We all have all kinds of crazy attractions. You realize, many of us have doughnut attractions. Right? I wake up every morning with a doughnut attraction. I want a dozen. How fast can I get to Meyer and eat a box of apple fritters? I mean, we all have them. The issue is not your attractions, the issue from the perspective of a Christian ethic is: are you going to filter your desires through the truth of the word of God and only act on what is obedient to your Savior? By the way, if you say, "Well, I couldn't do that because then I wouldn't be true to myself." Here is some advice: don't be true to yourself. There are all sorts of things about you that are displeasing to God and therefore, here's what you ought to do with any desire that does not please God: kill it. There it is, crucify it. Put it to death.

So, sure we may have members of this church who would say, "I have same sex attraction from time to time." That's not the issue but when a person says, "I want to act on that," and certainly that I would want to be in a gay wedding in this church as a member, that is not going to happen and if a day comes when we have to pay some sort of cultural price for that, bring it on. And what happened in Houston this week ought to astound us that representatives of the prosecuting attorney's office in Houston demanded the sermons and emails, private correspondence even, of five pastors related to what they had said about homosexuality and a particular legal initiative. That is outrageous and that's the nicest thing that I can say about that. But if our position on this matter based on Scripture as a church within the confines of the church house regarding the kingdom of heaven is ever something that we would have to go to jail for, bring it on. We'll start a jail ministry and I'd be happy for somebody to pay for my room and board for a while, that would be fine with me. Frankly, it would be a nice shot to the budget around here, frankly. Now, I got off my notes. How did that happen?

What about some of these other questions though? I mean, I took the easiest one first. What about some of these other questions? Well, I would say this about that: it requires the wisdom of Solomon. Some of these questions are harder. It's also possible that what is right for one person in this church may not be right for someone else. Do you understand that under the heading of Christian liberty, we have some freedom to navigate. We're never going to disobey Scripture but for example, what about the matter of your adult child saying that he or she is gay and wants to come for Thanksgiving dinner at your house and bring their gay partner? Are you in on that or are you out on that? Or what if Aunt Mabel wants everybody to come to her house for Thanksgiving and a gay relative and their partner are going to be there? Well look, let's face the fact that the Bible does not speak specifically to that issue so you're going to have to decide and if you want to talk about that on a case-by-case basis, we're happy to do that. I will say this to you about that at least from my perspective: many times it's best to err on the side of grace. Many times it's best to err on the side of love. And what you have to decide is: does my participation in this event, does it communicate affirmation of the lifestyle choices of everybody here or does it communicate my love for everybody here regardless of what they may believe, knowing that everybody knows what I believe and some of it is different? That's the key question and not everybody is going to be able to answer that question in every family situation. You're going to have to decide.

What about this matter of you're invited to the gay wedding of a friend or of a child of a friend? Again, you're going to have to decide that. The Scripture does not specifically speak to that issue and what I think the controlling matter is: does my participation communicate affirmation or does my participation communicate love for people even with whom I might disagree? Before you get to wound up about that, just remember this text, Romans 14:4, "Who are you to judge the servant of another?" So if somebody in this church makes a decision on some of the illustrations I just mentioned that are different than what you would of made, get happy about the fact that God has given us some freedom inside the family of God, right? Could I get an amen? Maybe it's okay for us not to be alike. I mean, unless you're a twin, God apparently thought one of you was well, just about enough and so. Well, that wasn't in my notes. Yes, I do love my job.

Now, what's the big point? The big point is: being an overcomer in the world has nothing to do with politics; it has nothing to do with culture wars; it has nothing to do with the endless arguments that exist all around us. John is talking about us overcoming the pressure and the power and the pull of this world system on our lives by practicing genuine faith in Christ and sincere love for others and joyful obedience to the commandments of God that we find is anything but burdensome. Friends, our world doesn't need our condemnation, they need our example and they need a joyful invitation to faith and new life in Christ.

Now, this text ends with one last characteristic. It's a marvelous one, it's the assurance of your eternal destiny. And the testimony is this, that God has given us eternal life and this life is in his Son. "He who has the Son has the life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have the life." That's the most amazing and important way that anybody could be an overcomer when you stare down what some have called the king of terrors, death itself as an overcomer. Paul said on the basis of the Gospel, "O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting? The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law; but thanks be to God, who gives us the," anybody want to guess the Greek word? Yeah, the nikos, the nikao, "victory through our Lord Jesus Christ."

Many of us have been praying for Alexandra's mother and Alexandra just returned from the funeral of her mom about a week or so ago. Here's some of what Alexandra said about her mom who was clearly a believer in Christ. "Even though Mama didn't understand why this happened to her, she never complained. On top of not complaining, she chose to worship God. God wasn't her genie who she went to with wishes to be granted. Jesus was her God, her armor, her love. She knew that even if he never healed her on earth, he's still God. The fainthearted live by how they feel, it's the warriors who move past that to choose to walk on higher ground. Mom was not a bitter woman because of her cancer. She radiated joy. Mama was beautiful for many reasons but her beauty shined bright because she chose to trust God's love for her throughout this storm. Trust is a choice. She chose joy over complaint. Even though she suffered without relief, Mama never had a victim mentality. Never once through word or deed did she display a second of self-pity. It would be an absolute disgrace to her memory if we walked away today feeling sorry for Mom. She never wanted to hear, "Poor Twyla," this is not who she was. Mama never let cancer define who she was. She was not a cancer victim. Cancer didn't win. Mama is in heaven with the God she worshiped."

You see, whatever is born of God overcomes the world and this is the victory that has overcome the world, our faith.

Let's stand together for prayer, shall we?

*Our Father in heaven, we thank you for these verses and we need these verses. Father, for anyone who is here today who has not yet trusted Christ, I pray that they would run to the cross in repentance and faith while the invitation is there. Lord, for those of us who know you, help us to think about ourselves correctly. Help us think about ourselves biblically. Not in some triumphalistic fashion but as overcomers because of what Christ has done in and through and what he continues to do in and through us. We pray this in Christ's name. Amen.*