

NEW LIFE IN CHRIST: FAITH, LOVE, AND OBEDIENCE
1 JOHN 5:1-3

In late April/early May, 1989 I remember very distinctly walking out of a seminary classroom building, crossing the street that separated the campus from our apartment and thinking, “I’ve taken my *last* exam; I’ve been taking tests in school for 21 years and I will never take another one. My test-taking days are finished.”

It was a real odd (and wonderful) thought. And was I wrong.

Oh, I’ve taken very few tests that someone has actually graded and given me a score since then (the NANC exam being one exception). But I’ve taken *many* tests since then. There have been tests of my character, tests of my husbanding skills, tests of my parenting skills, and tests as a pastor and preacher. My patience has been tested. And so has my physical endurance. And above all, my faith in Christ has been tested — what are the evidences of my trust in Christ?

Now unlike many other tests, the tests of our faith aren’t tests designed to make us fail, but they are designed to reveal the genuineness of our salvation. As John would say in the middle of 1 John 5 — “These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may know that you have eternal life” (v. 13).

Throughout this letter, John has been repeatedly coming back to the issues examined by these tests and in 5:1-3, he reiterates three fundamental tests that reveal the genuineness of our new life in Christ.

[WHEN ONE IS REGENERATED, HE WILL GIVE EVIDENCE OF THAT NEW LIFE BY FAITH, LOVE, AND OBEDIENCE.]

1. The Test of FAITH (v. 1a)

- ✓ Who SAVES?
- ✓ What do you BELIEVE?

2. The Test of LOVE (vv. 1b-2)

- ✓ Do you love God’s CHILDREN? (v. 1b)
- ✓ Do you love GOD? (v. 2)

3. The Test of OBEDIENCE (vv. 2b-3)

- ✓ Do you obey God’s WORD? (v. 2b)
- ✓ Do you obey God’s Word from the HEART? (v. 3a)
- ✓ Is obedience a BURDEN? (v. 3b)

1. The Test of FAITH (v. 1a)

- Who SAVES?
 - ✓ This morning we need to put on our grammar hats as we think about verse one.
 - ✓ There are two verbs (action words) in the opening clause — **believes** and **is born of**. The word **believes** is a present tense, which has the sense of something ongoing, perpetual, regular; so “he is believing,” or “he always believes...” But the verb **is born of** is what is called a perfect; it refers to something that has already happened, and what happened in the past is still a reality today. So, “he was born of God (regenerated) and is still born of God (is God’s child).”
 - ✓ When you put the two together, it means, “whoever is now believing in Jesus as the Christ (Messiah) is someone who has already been born again (regenerated) by God and he is still regenerated by God.”
 - ✓ Now why was John so particular, and why have I belabored that point? Because it demonstrates that faith is not the mechanism that saves anyone; what saves everyone is God who gives new life and that new life is evidenced when we believe. Salvation is not caused by believing; salvation is by means of grace and the salvation is only revealed by our faith. We are saved *by* grace, *through* faith (Eph. 2:8-9). Christians do not make themselves born again (God’s children) by faith and they do not keep themselves as God’s children by faith.
 - ✓ No, God is the one who saves as an act of grace all those who believe in Him. It is His work. We are not asking people to save themselves, but we are affirming that God is the one who is initiates and completes the work of salvation (which is one reason why Lee is teaching in the evangelism class not to pray a ‘sinners prayer’ when sharing the gospel so that they don’t come to think that is what has saved them).
 - ✓ Lazarus is the most prominent illustration of this spiritual reality: just as Jesus commanded Lazarus to come out of the tomb alive (Jn. 11:43), so he commands spiritually dead men to come to life. We do not save ourselves; God in His grace plans, initiates, and completes every part of our salvation. Our life is not dependent on ourselves, but on Him.
 - ✓ What is also important is not only *who* saves, but *what* we believe...
- What do you BELIEVE?
 - ✓ A blog post I read this week asked the question, “what does Satan want?” He doesn’t want money or land or position; he knows Christ is victorious and he can never usurp the throne of God that he craved, so the one thing left that he wants is for people not to believe in Christ. And he will do all he can to pervert the truth about Christ so they believe wrongly.

- ✓ There are three essentials to believe about Christ (two are explicit in this verse) —
 - He is fully man. He is ***Jesus***. The name ***Jesus*** was the name given to Him by Mary and Joseph and refers to His life on earth and His humanity. He was a real man who could identify in every way with our needs and temptations (Heb. 4:15).
 - He is fully God. He is ***the Christ***. This is a reference to His messianic title — and as such, not only is He deity, but He is also worthy of our worship and He is owed our worship and submission. He is the Lord of the universe to be followed.
 - His death (alone) frees men from the penalty and power of sin. This is implied, but it is clear throughout this letter (2:1-2; 3:5; 4:2, 9-10).
 - The false teachers denigrated the position of Christ; they minimized their sin (1:6, 8, 10), suggesting they didn't need Christ to die for them and they minimized Christ, suggesting that He was just another man (2:22-23) — not the unique Son of God (4:9).
- ✓ We live in a world where men believe they are free to save themselves (they don't have to submit to God or Christ) and where they can believe anything, as long as they have faith in something, and then they will be saved. No, we are not the masters of our own fate, and what we believe does matter. Believe wrongly and you will pay eternally for that error.
- ✓ What is the implication of all this? One cannot deny the essentials of Christ and be saved. There is a core of beliefs that *must* be embraced to be saved from wrath.
 - Christ was the dividing line between heresy and orthodoxy then and He is the same today.
 - Many will embrace and desire God. You can name "God" in a civil setting and be accepted, but name "Christ" and you will be ostracized and persecuted, because He is exclusive and restrictive — and people know that. They want God; they don't want Jesus. So they don't have God. Only those who confess Christ is fully God and man — redeemer — are God's.

"Saving faith depends on not just on a general warmth and positive feeling towards Christ, whatever some evangelistic presentations may imply. It depends on a doctrinal confession concerning the person of Christ, on which the whole of our experience of God actually depends." [Jackman, 127.]

- Theology and doctrinal precision are essential. Believe wrongly and you will die wrongly.
- If you believe rightly, it is an indication that you are indeed saved. That's the first test.

2. The Test of LOVE (vv. 1b-2)

- Throughout this book there have been multiple exhortations to love others in the body of Christ (2:4ff; 3:11ff; 4:7ff). In these two verses there are two reminders about what believers love.

- Do you love God's CHILDREN? (v. 1b)

- ✓ This has been the particular emphasis in the book — love each other. We've talked much about this in recent weeks, so I won't belabor it again, but only will note that if one loves God then he will love God's children.
- ✓ John's point is that if we love God, we have been born again (regenerated) and adopted into God's family, and if we are God's child, then we will also love all the others God also adopts as His children. This love is a present tense — it is continual and persistent. It doesn't quit.
- ✓ John's point is this: "How can I, as an adopted child of God (saved humbly by the death of Christ), not also love all the others God loved and Christ willingly died to save?"
- ✓ This is not a natural love — it is a supernatural work of the Spirit of Christ — "This love does not spring from something loveable in the person himself, but from his paternity." (C. Hodge)
- ✓ As one skeptic has noted, loving each other is not always easy (or natural):

*To live above with saints in love,
That will indeed be glory.
To live below with the saints we know,
That is quite another story.*

- ✓ So when we see believers loving one another, we know it is a result of salvation.
- ✓ There is also a second part to this test of love —

- Do you love GOD? (v. 2)

- ✓ John has repeatedly said that believers love and ought to love one another, so here he seems to be anticipating the question, "How do you know if you love God's children?" (v. 2a).
- ✓ His answer is, "You know you love the children of God if you love the Father" — **when we love God**. John Calvin said, "Men are loved rightly and duly when God stands first."
- ✓ In a sense, John has created a circular argument — if you love men, you'll love God and if you love God, you'll love men. His point is the same as what Jesus said, you can't have one love without the other. That's the essence of the entire OT law —

"And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength." The second is this, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these." (Mk. 12:30–31; NASB)

- ✓ So Augustine has said, "There can only be two basic loves — the love of God unto the forgetfulness of self, or the love of self unto the forgetfulness of God."

- ✓ To say we love God is to ask the question, “Is God supreme and above all other desires in my life? Where does God rank in my life? Do I want anything more than I want God?”

“The mighty God, the maker of heaven and earth, will not be one of many treasures, not even the chief of all treasures. He will be all in all or He will be nothing. God will not be used. His mercy and grace are infinite and His patient understanding is beyond measure, but He will not aid men in their selfish striving after personal gain. ... Yet popular culture has as one of its most effective talking points the idea that God exists to help people to get ahead in this world. The God of the poor has become the God of an affluent society.” [Wiersbe, The Best of A. W. Tozer, p. 179.]

- ✓ So we do well to ask the question of ourselves that Jesus asks Peter after Jesus’ resurrection: “do you love Me?” That’s the essential question. But since we are prone to self-delusion, how can we know with certainty. We can say, “Yes,” but do we? The final test in these verses tells us how we can know if we love God —

3. The Test of OBEDIENCE (vv. 2b-3)

- Do you obey God’s WORD? (v. 2b)
 - ✓ When we read the Bible, we often skip over words that help us make connections between ideas and verse 2 has one of those words that’s easy to miss — ***and*** — ***when we love God and observe His commandments***. The word “and” is John’s way of connecting love and obedience.
 - ✓ Do you want to know whether or not you love God? Then answer the question, “are you obedient to God’s commands?” Do you do what God says to do?
 - ✓ There are a couple of important implications from this part of verse 2 —
 - God commands and God has a right to command. He is infinitely wise so He always knows what is best for us; He is infinitely righteous so He always knows what is moral and good; and He is infinitely loving, so He always prescribes only what is good for us. Yes, He commands, but His commands are always given to lead us to lifestyles that are right, good, and beneficial for us.
 - Another implication is that this obedience and “doing” is voluntary and love-prompted. We obey because we want to obey — it is our joy to obey.
 - ✓ John Stott has suggested that, “love for God is not an emotional experience so much as moral obedience.” He’s right. There is affection in our love, but that affection is demonstrated through our submission to the Father.
 - ✓ But our obedience is God-honoring only if it is a particular kind of obedience —

- Do you obey God's Word from the HEART? (v. 3a)
 - ✓ Again in v. 3 John identifies what it means to love God — *that we keep His commandments*. Here John uses a different word for obedience; in verse 2 it was a word that is most often translated, “do” or “did.” But the word *keep* has the idea of protection and guarding; diligent care is taken to preserve those commandments. It has the sense of an internal joy in the obedience; not only is there outward conformity to God's commands, but there is inner delight in doing what God says.

“While we cannot separate love and action, we do not love simply by doing. We do because we love... Christian love does not ask ‘must I,’ but ‘may I’; it does not count the cost, but weighs the privilege.”
[Hobbs, quoted by Hiebert, 227.]

- ✓ So the simple thing to ask is not only, “do you willfully and intentionally seek to obey God's Word?” but also, “Do you *desire* to obey God because you want to please Him?”
- ✓ This is an examination of our motive. The unbeliever might attempt to obey God's rules because they believe there is some moral benefit or that through their obedience they might merit some kind of approval and reward from God. The believer is obedient not only because of the benefit, but because He desires to live for the Lord.
- ✓ God wants obedience that flows from a desire for Him (1 Sam. 15:22; Is. 1:11ff; 43:23-25; 65:1-5; 66:3-4; Jer. 6:19-20; 7:21-26; 14:11-12; 17:26; 44:22-23; Hos. 6:6; 8:11-14; 9:4; 12:11; Joel 2:13; Amos 4:4-6; 5:21-27; Micah 6:6-8; Mal. 1:6ff; 2:11-13).
- ✓ This is one of the lessons from Ps. 119 —

- *Psa. 119:16 I shall delight in Your statutes; I shall not forget Your word.*
- *Psa. 119:24 Your testimonies also are my delight; They are my counselors.*
- *Psa. 119:35 Make me walk in the path of Your commandments, For I delight in it.*
- *Psa. 119:47 I shall delight in Your commandments, Which I love.*
- *Psa. 119:48 And I shall lift up my hands to Your commandments, Which I love; And I will meditate on Your statutes.*
- *Psa. 119:70 Their heart is covered with fat, But I delight in Your law.*
- *Psa. 119:77 May Your compassion come to me that I may live, For Your law is my delight.*
- *Psa. 119:92 If Your law had not been my delight, Then I would have perished in my affliction.*
- *Psa. 119:97 O how I love Your law! It is my meditation all the day.*
- *Psa. 119:113 I hate those who are double-minded, But I love Your law.*
- *Psa. 119:119 You have removed all the wicked of the earth like dross; Therefore I love Your testimonies.*

- *Psa. 119:127 Therefore I love Your commandments Above gold, yes, above fine gold.*
- *Psa. 119:132 Turn to me and be gracious to me, After Your manner with those who love Your name.*
- *Psa. 119:143 Trouble and anguish have come upon me, Yet Your commandments are my delight.*
- *Psa. 119:159 Consider how I love Your precepts; Revive me, O LORD, according to Your lovingkindness.*
- *Psa. 119:163 I hate and despise falsehood, But I love Your law.*
- *Psa. 119:165 Those who love Your law have great peace, And nothing causes them to stumble.*
- *Psa. 119:167 My soul keeps Your testimonies, And I love them exceedingly.*
- *Psa. 119:174 I long for Your salvation, O LORD, And Your law is my delight.*

✓ There is one final question related to the obedience of the believer —

- Is obedience a BURDEN? (v. 3b)

- ✓ John anticipates that question with a very clear statement — ***they are not burdensome***.
- ✓ That does not mean that it is always easy to obey. And that does not mean that there is never any temptation to disobey. And that does not mean there will never be a struggle to obey.
- ✓ But it does mean that when everything has been evaluated, obedience is not a heavy, oppressive, unfair, and unjust weight that is put on believers.
- ✓ Jesus addressed this very topic in **Mt. 11:28-30**. The legalistic regulations of the Pharisees were heavy (Mt. 23:4; Lk. 11:4ff), but the yoke of Jesus is light.
- ✓ The world will say that there is freedom in sin and selfish indulgence; but this verse is a reminder that there is a slavish yoke to sin that will strangle and kill (**Rom. 6:20-21**) — the licentious acts of men are as savage and cruel as wild animals (Acts 20:29). So while obedience to God's Word may be difficult and a battle at times, it is always for our freedom and joy.
- ✓ There is another reality that must also be noted with this — not only are the commands of God not a burden when seen from the perspective of eternity, but they are not a burden because God has given us the power to obey. For an unbeliever, God's commands are a burden because he can never obey God; but for the believer, because of the Holy Spirit, there is a power and ability to be obedient to the Lord — we are ***overcomers*** and ***victors*** (vv. 4-5).
- ✓ Is obedience easy? No, not necessarily. But is obedience good? Is it for our benefit? Yes. Always. And because of that, obedience is not a burden.
 - “The cost of obedience is nothing compared with the cost of disobedience.” [Anonymous]
 - The commands are not more burdensome to the believer than wings are to a bird. [Jackman]
 - “God commands nothing but what is beneficial...[So] to obey God, is not so much our duty as our privilege.” [Thomas Watson]

“...by them Your servant is warned;
In keeping them there is great reward.” (Ps. 19:11)

CONCLUSION:

The story is told that when the Union-Pacific railroad was being constructed between St. Louis and California that a construction engineer wanted to test the strength of a bridge over a particular, large canyon. So he loaded the train with extra cars, and put enough equipment on the train to double its normal payload. He then drove the train onto the bridge and parked it in the middle, where it stayed for an entire day. Seeing what was going on, a worker complained to the engineer, “what are you trying to do — break the bridge?” “No,” the engineer replied, “I’m trying to prove the bridge is unbreakable.”

So it is with the tests of our life in Christ — they are given to affirm the reality of life in us. And here John gives three tests to examine and reveal the reality of that new life in Christ:

- ✓ the test of faith — what do you believe about Jesus?
- ✓ the test of love — whom do you love?
- ✓ the test of obedience — do you obey God?

And when you see genuine faith, love, and obedience, you can know that you have eternal life (5:13).