

1 John 5:1-3 (NKJV)

1 Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God, and everyone who loves Him who begot also loves him who is begotten of Him.

2 By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and keep His commandments.

3 For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments. And His commandments are not burdensome.

I like Paul's writings. He starts at point **A** and tells you when he goes to point **B**. Oh, lots of times he takes long parenthesis, but he is, for the most part, linear.

Not so with John. Paul approaches the discourse like a topic with points. John approaches the discourse like it is "just life". This is not to say that one is better than the other. But it is to say that you must approach both writers differently.

What does John say about **how we know we love God**? **We love the children** of God. OK, **how do we know that we love the children** of God? Well, **we love God**. Well then **how do we know we love God**? Well **we keep His commandments**.

Do you see what I mean?

I have addressed this before. But I think it is important that I address it again. When Brad is transporting a patient in an ambulance, he is looking at more than one measurement. Maybe it is the person's **pulse**, maybe **blood pressure**, maybe **blood oxygen level**, maybe **temperature**. Why? Why not just look at one? Well 1 does not tell the whole story? There is more to know about that patient. Everything is interrelated.

Will you ever expect to find in a living patient a pulse but no blood pressure? Or blood pressure but the patient is room temperature? Not for long. That is for sure.

No life isn't like that. You will find if one life indicator is present, there are many that are present. And it does not surprise the medical professionals to find that to be true. They expect it. They are alarmed if it isn't so.

Well that is similar to John's approach at determining spiritual life in a person. He has three gauges that he keeps going back to. And each determines the other's existence.

If we are born again, if we are alive spiritually-

We believe in Christ

We obey Christ

And we love the brethren.

None of those traits exist by themselves. They are all equally signs of life. That is how we must understand 1 John.

What this also tells us is that just an **intellectual understanding** of good doctrine **by itself**, proves nothing.

Actions that appear to do what the Bible says to do **by themselves** mean nothing.

And doing nice things to believers **by itself** means nothing.

If there is true spiritual life, all three of those life monitors will be beeping.

That is why John is so quick to look to a different monitor when he is trying to prove the results of the other. I hope that helps you understand 1 John a little better.

Now back to the text.

1 Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God, and everyone who loves Him who begot also loves him who is begotten of Him.

Let's put on our systematic theology hat for a minute. The word "believes" in this test is Pisteuo PistYou'Owe

It means to have faith and it is always connected with an object. So secular songs that say "You gotta have faith" have nothing to do with this word. This is not faith for faith's sake. It is not faith in faith. It is faith in a person. It is faith in Christ. It involves a commitment to the one that is the object of that faith.

It is also important to know that the word "believes" is in present tense. It means the one that **has believed** and is **still** actively believing. But the word for **born** is in the **perfect** tense. That means it happened in the past but is still having an effect.

This means that the faith did not **create** the effect of new birth. **New birth created** the effect of **faith**. Like we have been taught, regeneration precedes faith. I won't belabor the point. But I could if needed. We need to really understand that when scripture speaks specifically about the cause of us coming to faith, it always describes what **God did to us**, not we did **in response** to God. God causes that rebirth in us apart from our decision making. But if He elected us, we are certain to respond.

Notice too, the **target** of this belief. Again, it is not just some open ended concept of faith. It is faith in the person and work of Jesus Christ. And even this is not open ended. This is the **Biblical** Christ according to the record laid down in scripture. Having a belief in a **concept** of Christ that is self created is no different than bowing down to some wooden idol that we carved this morning out of a 2x4. There is a lot of that going around. But that is not Christianity.

Only belief in the person and work of Jesus Christ can save a person. Nothing else can. We must be very clear about that.

Now look at the rest of verse 1. We talked about that last week.

everyone who loves Him who begot also loves him who is begotten of Him.

How do we know if we love Christ? We love our brothers and sisters. That is part of our spiritual family genetics. And even more than that, we have a recognition that none of us were saved by any **merit** of our own. If that is true, everybody who **got in** got in **like we did**, through mind blowing grace. And if that is true, we all have that most significant thing in common and it is the glue in our fellowship. **Mutual grace.**

Now we switch to a different monitor to look for spiritual signs of life.

² By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and keep His commandments.

This is what I referred to earlier. It seems backwards. It seems like circular reasoning. But if I were to say that I know that I have a pulse because I have a high blood oxygen level and I know that I have some kind of oxygen level if I have a pulse. Do you see what I mean? It really makes sense when you approach it like John does. He is holistic about the topic.

Now, sometimes I feel like I am beating a dead horse when I talk about the necessity for obedience in the Christian life. But there is always a danger of an incomplete understanding of the Gospel to where we think it saves us but does not significantly change us. 1 John removes that from even being a possibility. Some preach that obedience is **optional** in the Christian life. Obedience is how you get the good seats as opposed to the cheap seats in heaven. But that is nonsense. John uses obedience as a **sign of life**. So to say that **obedience** is optional in the Christian life is like saying a **heartbeat** is optional in daily life. If there is no obedience, there is no life. It is really that simple.

Are any of us trying to live a Christian life where we accept disobedience as a normal occurrence? That is devastatingly dangerous. That is a game that we don't want to keep playing. What we might be displaying is that Christ is not in our lives at all.

And the opposite is true as well. It does not really matter how hard the struggle is. If you are obeying Christ where you feel strongly compelled to disobey Him, praise God. That is an undeniable sign of life. And it will also result in doing things for brothers and sisters to meet their needs at your personal expense. That is all good.

Now the rest of our time together will be spent in verse three. And the lion's share will be on the last phrase.

3 For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments. And His commandments are not burdensome.

James Montgomery Boice says that **"Love divorced from obedience to the commands of God is not love."**

I believe we spoke of this last week. If we really love God, we take an active involvement in finding out what He wants from us and doing it. If you are hoping to verify your love in some other way, if you think you can avoid this pursuit, you are making a grave error. Wonderful songs, deep emotion, great sacrificial acts of service cannot substitute.

To **obey** is better than **sacrifice**. We humans tend to be impressed by dramatics. God is not. His plan for our **ultimate** happiness is our **continual** obedience. King Saul wanted to make a massive sacrifice of animals to God. That would have looked like an impressive tribute. But God wanted Saul to do exactly what the prophet told him to do. Because to obey God continually displays that we trust Him continually. And our flesh is very averse to allowing that to happen. We come up with millions of excuses. But unbelief is at the core of all of them. We really don't believe that obedience in every circumstance of our lives is what will bring us the greatest ultimate happiness? When we wrap our heads around that, we gain an avenue of escaping most of the things that are making us miserable. I am not talking about avoiding the circumstances. I am talking about avoiding the mindsets that cause us misery.

I have a simple question.

Do you obey God when your strongest desires and compulsions and instincts raise their shouting voices?

I will ask the same question a different way.

How much do you really love God? It is pretty much the same question. Now let's look at the last phrase.

And His commandments are not burdensome.

I think this is the hardest saying in 1 John. I am probably revealing myself here. The word for burdensome means heavy. It means the keeping of the commands is not grievous. It is not a terrible weight we must carry.

I don't know about you but there are some things I find very hard to obey. I must struggle to obey them. I must do battle. Sometimes that battle is very difficult. I find continually that my flesh does not want to obey. My heart has a war on its hands.

Do you find that same thing true in your lives?

How do we think about this in light of what Jesus said?

Matthew 11:28-30 (NKJV)

28 Come to Me, all *you* who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.

29 Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.

30 For My yoke *is* easy and My burden is light."

Here Jesus is calling to His followers to live in relationship with Him. We are no longer to try to do all this stuff in our own strength. We are not pulling ourselves up by our own bootstraps.

The imagery is of people who are trying to do the impossible in their own strength and they are wore out. They are trying to earn their own salvation by their own righteousness and they cannot do it. They are at the point of despair. They simply cannot continue.

Then Christ calls them to Himself and says, " I know you need a break. I know that **you cannot** do this. So come here. You and I can yoke up like Oxen where we **share** the pulling. I will teach you how to accomplish what you need to accomplish step by step. I will teach you to do what you **must do**. And I will **do for you** what you cannot do **for yourself**. Just remain yoked to me. Keep listening. Keep following. Keep trusting me to give you exactly what you need. I know sometimes it will seem like this is more than you can bear. But remember who it is that you have yoked to you. There is no reason to fear. There is no reason to despair. There is no reason to give up. I am hooked to the load you are carrying. And if you trust me, you will find out, the huge load that is hooked to us both is not near as hard to carry as you think it will be. You need to quit looking at the load and look at me.

If you will only trust me, you will find rest for your soul. Oh there is still activity to do. There is still a weight to pull. I am not telling you I will take that from you. But as you trust me, that which seemed unbearable becomes a normal ordinary task. It is no longer impossible or overwhelming or destructive. It is simply, well, easy work.

I think that is describing what our text is describing.

Let's take a look at the negative extreme. Let's look at someone who viewed the commands a burdensome. Can you guess where I am going to go next?

Matthew 25:14-30 (NKJV)

14 "For *the kingdom of heaven is* like a man traveling to a far country, *who* called his own servants and delivered his goods to them.

15 And to one he gave five talents, to another two, and to another one, to each according to his own ability; and immediately he went on a journey.

16 Then he who had received the five talents went and traded with them, and made another five talents.

17 And likewise he who *had received* two gained two more also.

18 But he who had received one went and dug in the ground, and hid his lord's money.

Now we need to take a close look at this guy's reasoning

19 After a long time the lord of those servants came and settled accounts with them.

20 So he who had received five talents came and brought five other talents, saying, 'Lord, you delivered to me five talents; look, I have gained five more talents besides them.'

21 His lord said to him, 'Well *done*, good and faithful servant; you were faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your lord.'

22 He also who had received two talents came and said, 'Lord, you delivered to me two talents; look, I have gained two more talents besides them.'

23 His lord said to him, 'Well *done*, good and faithful servant; you have been faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your lord.'

Look at this. These guys regarded the command as reasonable. They trusted their Lord and they saw the request as reasonable. So they gladly did what they were told and received a rich reward.

24 Then he who had received the one talent came and said, 'Lord, I knew you to be a hard man, reaping where you have not sown, and gathering where you have not scattered seed.

25 And I was afraid, and went and hid your talent in the ground. Look, *there* you have *what is yours*.'

26 But his lord answered and said to him, 'You wicked and lazy servant, you knew that I reap where I have not sown, and gather where I have not scattered seed.

27 So you ought to have deposited my money with the bankers, and at my coming I would have received back my own with interest.

28 Therefore take the talent from him, and give *it* to him who has ten talents.

29 For to everyone who has, more will be given, and he will have abundance; but from him who does not have, even what he has will be taken away.

³⁰ And cast the unprofitable servant into the outer darkness. There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.'

I think this is the perfect example of someone who views the Lord's commands as **burdensome**. And what is the real problem? The servant does not trust the master to have His best interest in mind. He takes the commands as **heartless** demands upon Him by the **meanness** of the boss. He resents the control this person holds over his life. And he responds in a passive aggressive maneuver hoping to place himself in a position where **he won't be punished** but he really did not **look after the master's best interest**.

I suspect this person could have tried and failed in a thousand ways and the master of the story would have been patient with him. But the Master was not going to have any part of this wicked hearted game.

What command has God given you that makes you angry? What situation has He placed in your life that, not only can you not give thanks for, but you resent the master putting you in this situation? What situation are you in that you fixate upon and make yourself miserable?

Do you see the similarity here. Do you see the problem?

Christ's commands are not burdensome. He will give you rest. Come into close fellowship with Him as you carry this weight and He is sure to carry what you cannot.

That is what He promises. How are you doing with yoking up with your Savior?

Now what is the opposite of this kind of resentment toward God? What is the opposite of this burdensome opposition to God's commands?

Here is what David had come to.

Psalm 40:7-8 (NKJV)

⁷ Then I said, "Behold, I come; In the scroll of the book *it is* written of me.

⁸ I **delight** to do Your will, O my God, And Your law *is* within my heart."

Psalm 119:24 (NKJV)

²⁴ Your testimonies also *are* my **delight** And my counselors.

Psalm 119:35 (NKJV)

³⁵ Make me walk in the path of Your commandments, For I **delight** in it.

Psalm 119:92 (NKJV)

⁹² Unless Your law *had been* my **delight**, I would then have perished in my affliction.

Here we find ourselves talking about happiness again. That is what delight is. It is pleasure. I said that this is a hard text because I cannot say my heart always responds like this. There are commands that I enjoy obeying. But I

have got to admit that I have some growing to do before I respond to all of them like David is doing here. Some of them I have to work through. I know that my Master has every right to give the commands. And I believe they are for my good. And I trust the situations He has placed me in are perfect for the maturing of my faith. But the flesh is still at battle at some points. And I don't like battles. Maybe that is not what is meant by commands being burdensome. But maybe it is. I would like to be like David. I would like obeying everything that scripture tells me to do as a delight. I hope we are in that pursuit together.

I find some hope in a few quotes I discovered.

James Montgomery Boice said, **"The life of God within makes obedience to the commands possible, and the love the Christian has for God and for other Christians makes this obedience desirable."**

Reformed Expository Commentary - Reformed Expository Commentary - 1-3 John.

Do we desire this obedience? Do we want it? Do we know the good in it? Do we know that it is the path to the happiness God has for us?

D.L. Moody often said, **"Every Bible should be bound in shoe leather." We show our love to God, not by empty words but by willing works. We are not slaves obeying a master; we are children obeying a Father.** *Bible*

Exposition Commentary (BE Series) - New Testament - The Bible Exposition Commentary - New Testament, Volume 2.

I think that is really the secret of not resenting the commands. It is all based upon how we view the One giving the commands. If we view Him as a harsh, uncaring, uninvolved task master, we cannot help but resent the demands he makes upon us. But if we regard Him as a loving Heavenly Father, we can receive the commands, even the ones we find unpleasant, as a meaningful expression of our love.

I am not sure who this quote is from:

A Christian who experiences God's perfecting love finds himself enjoying the Word of God and truly loving it. He does not read the Bible as a textbook, but as a love letter.

Bible Exposition Commentary (BE Series) - New Testament - The Bible Exposition Commentary - New Testament, Volume 2.

There again is the gist of it. We know that our God loves us. We trust that. We believe that. But it is still hard to do some of the things that we are asked to do. And it is not because we think our loving God is taking advantage of us in some way. It is only that our flesh is not domesticated to the place it should

be. We have not mortified the flesh to the degree we must. So in order to obey properly, we must kill sin or sin will be killing us.

So how are God's commands to us? Do we view them as a burden we would like to shake free of? Or do we, deep down, understand that they are for our ultimate happiness? That any restrictions they involve are for our good? And any action they demand will result in our ultimate benefit? As our minds believe that truth, we have the necessary fuel to do battle with our flesh. I don't think we should despair when God's commands **feel** like a burden. But we need to look at where that is coming from. For sure it is not coming from faith. And often we can find it's **root** in our **lack of trust** in the character of God. Sometimes, deep down, we are not convinced that **He has our best in mind** and we do not believe that He is **actively delivering on that intention** in our lives.

Ultimately a command designed **for our good** given to us by a **loving Creator** and Designer is not a **burden**. It is a **blessing**. And **worthy of delight**.