

WALKING IN THE LIGHT- First John and the Path to Living Deeply in Christ - Part twenty-two

Sunday, June 20th, 2021 - 10:00 a.m. - Teaching #2111

Pastor Don Horban, Cedarview Community Church, Newmarket, ON

THE FAITH THAT SAVES MUST OVERCOME THE WHOLE WORLD

1 John 5:1-12 - "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? [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."

One of the advantages of working through a whole book of the Bible is you are far more likely to get the ***whole picture*** of what the author is trying to say. There's a balance and a fullness to the message on his heart and you and I are much less likely to miss or distort it when we hear it in full. Today we will get a classic example of this principle of balance and completeness in hearing all of the Spirit's message to our church.

After an amazing string of verses pointing out the ***freeness*** and ***completeness*** of God's love for us, and an encouragement to ***rely*** on that love - to let it take the ***fear*** out of our souls - John immediately moves back to the subject of demonstrating our love for God by our ***obedience***:

IPAD TEXT - 1 John 5:2-3a - “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....*”

My love for God ***includes*** deep emotional attachment, but it isn't ***limited*** to my emotions. John means to bring us back to this truth. This is why it's so important to be a careful ***student*** of God's Word. The church mustn't just talk about the ***beauty*** or the ***importance*** of the Bible. The church ought to be the place where people learn to ***study*** the Word. The church should be a place where people eventually come to know ***all*** the Scriptures. No church is worth its salt if it majors on fun, food, and ecstasy. It's not anywhere near enough just to be trendy or happy or tolerant or wild at heart. The church is the place where people are trained to ***relate each part of the Scripture to the teaching of the whole.***

It's never enough to know only ***one*** thing, or ***two*** things. There's a ***completeness*** of revelation in God's Word. Each part of it is needed to complete and explain the rest. There's a depth in God's plan for knowing and pleasing Him, and He never once even ***hinted*** that it was an easy thing or a fun thing to learn it all. It's joy-producing for sure. But disciples are ***learners***. We're learners of God for life.

Here's why all of this matters. Only truth known in its **fullness** and **completeness** will set people free. Truth learned lightly or only in part will always lead to error and bondage. Lopsided theology is the cruellest taskmaster on earth. **Knowing only half the truth is the surest road to self destruction.** If I know **nothing at all** about flying a plane and stay on the ground I won't be in nearly as much danger as if I actually try to **fly** a plane knowing only very little about it. Knowing **part** of the truth can be worse than knowing **none** of it.

John teaches on the nature of Christian faith in our text. Like all good teachers John now labors to keep the two sides of living faith properly fastened together. It is full of **freeness** and **grace**, and it is packed with **sacrificial obedience**. And John sees no contradiction in any of that.

I have three thoughts from this text. We'll study one today and two next Sunday.

1) **WHEN GOD'S GRACE TAKES ROOT IN MY UNDERSTANDING IT
PRODUCES OBEDIENCE WITH JOY**

IPAD TEXT - 1 John 5:2-3 - "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."

"Here," says John, "is what God's grace does." He's trying to put it as bluntly as he can. For the one who loves God through Christ Jesus there's **obedience** but not **burden**. There is **effort** to please God, but it's **joyful** effort, never given **grudgingly**. The old KJV says God's commands are not "**grievous**." That's the idea. I don't feel **grief** about obeying God. I don't feel I'm being **short-changed** in any way. I see the beauty of God's ways.

It's really all summed up in that **third verse** - "**For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments....**" - IPAD TEXT. This means I keep the commands **out of** love for God. We hear that so often that it's not as striking as it might be. This truth really **defines** the Christian. **Only** the Christian can say that. Only the Christian looks over his experience in Christ and comes to this conclusion - "**This is the love of God, that we keep His commandments.**"

The **religious moralist** keeps the commandments because he hopes he can make God love him. The **atheist** may keep **some** of the commandments because he thinks this will benefit mankind while he's here on earth. Only the **Christian** keeps the commandments because he **loves** God. And he loves God because he has **already been loved** - **amazingly** loved - in fact, already **pardoned** by God in all his sin and wickedness - **given eternal life** in God the Son, Jesus Christ. And because he's already been loved so incredibly, the Christian loves God in return and obeys Him with joy.

He **obeys** because he has been **redeemed**. He obeys with **joyous love and gratitude**. A **religious legalist** obeys hoping to **qualify** for God's love and salvation. A **Christian** obeys because he's **already been** redeemed by God's transforming grace.

Both perform good works. But the works of the religious legalist are called “**dead works**” in the Bible. They’re not dead in the sense that they won’t benefit society or make the world a better place, but dead as a **means of making the worker right with God**.

In the genuine disciple the same works are properly called, not **dead works**, but **devotion** or **worship** because they are offered from a heart, not aiming at **societal improvement** or **personal reform**, but **devotion to God**, made acceptable only through **faith in Jesus Christ**.

Paul talks about the obedience of worship in **Romans 12:1-2** - “**I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. [2] Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.**” - IPAD TEXT

Notice the way Paul links together the ***mercies of God*** with the ***renewal of the mind***. It's important to think those words through because they are more than beautiful prose. There is a truth Paul is chiseling out, and it's this - the ***mind*** is ***affected*** by God's ***mercy***. It's turned in the ***direction of God's commandments***. Even when I fail in my efforts - even when I sin - my mind and heart are still seeking after God's ways.

That means when I ***sin***, it's with ***grief***. I am not yet perfect but I don't ***love*** sin anymore. That's not where I live. I'm ***devoted*** to God, not to sin. What I ***love*** is to please God. What I'm striving for is the ***forsaking of sin***. That's the new direction of my whole life.

And here's Paul's main point. It is ***receiving and reviewing God's mercies in Christ Jesus*** that has brought this new direction and joy. In other words, ***grace fuels obedience by changing, or "renewing" my mind toward obeying God***. It can never in a million years ***promote indifference or laziness in my devotion to God***.

This is exactly what John means in **1 John 3:6 - "No one who abides in him keeps on sinning; no one who keeps on sinning has either seen him or known him."** - IPAD TEXT

I can no longer find my source of delight in sin. I find my delight in God's ways. I can't dwell continuously in sin when grace has done its work in my heart. In my **“renewed mind”** there is no longer any **joy** or **perceived future** or **satisfaction** in sin. **Sin** has become the **burden**. God's law is **not** a burden.

"Well, I often find it very hard to resist temptation and obey God's laws. Are you saying I'm not a Christian?"

No, not at all. Please understand. It always takes **effort - lots** of effort - to walk in God's ways. It's a constant battle. It will never be easy this side of heaven. But while it constantly takes **effort**, it's **effort I long to expend**. I don't consider God to be a waste of time because, since experiencing His saving grace, I don't consider His **promises** to be empty. He has been so gracious to me in Christ I **trust** His heart toward me fully.

Because of the grace I've so lavishly received in Christ I always give God the benefit of the doubt with my obedience. He has proven His love so I don't consider His **commands** to be an interruption or a misery. Rather, they are His gracious, loving, joy-producing plans for my life.

In fact, I **make** the effort to obey God because I **believe** God's promises so fully and **love** God so much. I know that a joyous life is found on His terms rather than mine. So in this fallen world His ways **do** require **diligence** but they are never a **burden**.

The terms we use to explain this need to be very precise and thought through. **Effort** is not the same as **burden**. It takes effort and thought to be a good husband. But, because I love my wife, it is never a burden. This is a small picture of how God's grace has changed my heart toward Him.

Let me explain this a bit more because it's so key to everything else. The Bible describes **two kinds of approach** to the commands of God. And these two types of verses will be a source of confusion unless this distinction is kept clear:

- a) ***First, there's the approach to God's commands apart from His grace in Christ Jesus.*** Or, to say it a bit differently, there is a **natural** approach - perhaps even a **religious** approach - to the law of God - the rules of religion - **without** the regenerating presence of the Holy Spirit through Christ.

We looked at this indirectly at length a few weeks ago in **1 John 4:13 - "By this we know that we abide in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit."** - IPAD TEXT

The **Holy Spirit** starts everything in the Christian life. The Spirit works savingly in my life by attaching me to Christ. In John's terminology it is the Spirit who causes me to **abide** in Christ. So if I approach God's law apart from a deep abiding in His grace in Christ Jesus I will be approaching it apart from the work of the Holy Spirit. And when I approach God's law apart from the Spirit's regenerating work through Christ God's ways become **bare duty**.

This may be a mind-set of absolute **rebellion** ("Who is God and what right does He have to tell me what to do?"). Or, probably more commonly, it may be a wilful attempt to **misuse** the law of God by turning it into a system to **earn** salvation by my own works **apart** from God's grace in Jesus Christ.

But the main point here is whenever people approach God's law apart from His grace in Christ Jesus they find it terrifying, hard and condemning in its terms. That's the only way they **can** see God's law because they're **misusing** it. If you make the law your **means** to God you're dead meat on a hook.

When the law of God is approached this way it's called the
 “...the law that brings wrath....”(Romans 4:15) and the
 “ministry of death, carved in letters on stone....”(2
 Corinthians 3:7). Or look at Paul's words in Romans 7:9 - “I
 was once alive apart from the law, but when the
 commandment came, sin came alive and I died.” - IPAD
 TEXT

But there are *other* verses, just as true, that describe God's law
 in much more glowing terms. Consider this in the proper way to
 follow Jesus in this world:

- b) *It is clear from the Scriptures there is another way of
 approaching the law of God that brings out a very different
 response.* The *spiritual mind* sees something totally different in
 the law of God, and it starts to show up even under the Old
 Covenant:

IPAD TEXT - Psalm 119:29-32 - “Put false ways far from me
 and graciously teach me your law! [30] I have chosen the
 way of faithfulness; I set your rules before me. [31] I cling to
 your testimonies, O Lord; let me not be put to shame! [32] I
 will run in the way of your commandments when you enlarge
 my heart!”

IPAD TEXT - Psalm 119:47-48 - “...I find my delight in your commandments, which I love. [48] I will lift up my hands toward your commandments, which I love, and I will meditate on your statutes.”

IPAD TEXT - James 1:25 - “But the one who looks into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and perseveres, being no hearer who forgets but a doer who acts, he will be blessed in his doing.”

This is really striking. These verses describe the ***very same law*** that was earlier called the ***"law of wrath"*** and the ***"ministry of death."*** We need to think this through. What's happening here?

In short, ***you have to love God before you can love His law.*** And you ***can't*** love God until you have known His ***grace***. And the Bible says grace and truth came in ***Jesus Christ***. It is this message of grace and truth in Christ Jesus that the Holy Spirit applies to my mind to ***"renew"*** it. And there were just enough pictures and hints at God's redemptive heart, even in the Old Testament, that there were those who saw God's ***"faithfulness"*** and His ***"mercy"*** behind all His commands.

Of course John says it all much more clearly and completely. We've already studied words like "***We love because he first loved us***"(4:19). When God reaches in and changes my understanding of Himself and His ways by revealing the full intent and scope of His grace in Jesus Christ - when He loves me, giving His grace while I was still bound in sin and guilt, when He loves me so mercifully while I was His enemy - my heart is tugged and my mind is renewed (**Romans 12:1-2**) to long to please Him by keeping His ways.

Perhaps I can say it this way. I begin to be more shaped by His ***promises*** than by my own ***desires*** because He has revealed His loving intentions so fully to me in Christ Jesus. And now we're in the best position to understand those well-known words from 1 John 5:4 - "**....And this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith.**"

Only in Christ can the Holy Spirit cause my heart to see God's law as my highest pleasure and delight. All of this is what John means when he says, "**For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments. And his commandments are not burdensome.**"

More on this next week.