

February 14, 2016 by Steve Brandon



Faith, Love and Obedience

1 John 5:1-5

1. Do You Believe in the Christ? (verse 1a)
2. Do You Have the Love of the Father? (verses 1b-2)
3. Do You Obey? (verses 3-5)

I want to begin this morning with a gift. It's a book entitled, "How to Walk Into Church" by Tony Payne. Westminster Bookstore was putting on an incredible sale on these books, so I purchased a bunch of them. I purchased enough for every family to have a copy.

It's a small book, only 65 pages, which you can easily read in one sitting. Perhaps you want to spread it out and read it at your Family Worship, You might find that profitable. The book addresses the heart of what we do in coming to church each Sunday morning. I believe that we can all benefit from this little book. To whet your appetite, I share one quote, ...

How you walk into church will be determined by what you think church is, and what you think you're doing there. If you think church is a bit like going to the movies, you might walk in expecting to be entertained or inspired. If you think church is an opportunity for personal devotion and worship, you'll probably walk in not wanting to interact too much with anyone else. If you think church is something you have to do in order to 'do the right thing' or stay on God's good side, you'll walk in with a determination to do what needs to be done (and then leave as soon as possible). But if you were to understand what the Bible says about church—about what church is, and why we go there, and what we're supposed to do while we're there—then there is no particular way to walking into church that you would want to master. This way of walking into church beautifully expresses what church is and what it's meant to be, and why we're all there. It is this: we should walk into church praying about where to sit.

...

If we walk into church praying, we're putting ourselves in the right posture or frame of mind toward God. We are turning our hearts to the one who is the centre [sic.] of everything, including church. Secondly, when we pray about where to sit, we're also putting ourselves in the right frame of mind towards each other. We have started to think about church as being about someone other than me.

This can be quite a mind-shift, but it's a vital one. We come to church not only to be loved and blessed by God, but also to love and bless others around us. We come not to spectate or consume, nor even to have our own personal encounter with God. We come to love and serve.

...

So when we pray about where to sit, we're trusting that what we do at church really matters; that God has something important for us to do—in particular, someone he wants us to sit next to, talk with, listen to, pray for and encourage. [\[1\]](#)

So, take the books. They will be on the back table at the end of the service. One per family would be great. If you are visiting with us this morning, it's a great morning to be with us, because you go away with a gift. And if you eventually make Rock Valley Bible Church your church home, you will have many opportunities to apply these things with a church family that is seeking to do these same things as well.

So, now, I invite you to open your Bibles to 1 John, chapter 5. This morning, we return to 1 John where we left off a month ago. During the month of January, we reflected upon the theme of prayer, and its vital importance to our lives. And its vital importance to our church. My hope and my prayer is that we all would grow day by day in our dependence upon the Lord.

Jesus taught us to pray, "Give us this day our daily bread." I saw this in action yesterday. Yesterday, I was responsible for feeding our dog her breakfast in the morning. She gets the same thing every day: an egg, a spoonful of yogurt, omega supplement, and dry dog food. As I was preparing these things, there she was, watching intently at everything that I was doing, licking her chops because of the saliva forming in her mouth. Just like she does every day of her life.

And as I watched, I reflected upon how she is totally dependent upon us. And every day, she looks intently at what we prepare for her. And every day, we provide for her. I so want us to seek the Lord in a similar way, dependent upon him for our daily food.

We are in 1 John, chapter 5. Our text this morning covers the first five verses. Let me read these verses for you now.

1 John 5:1-5

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. By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and obey his commandments. For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments. And his commandments are not burdensome. For everyone who has been born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith. Who is it

that overcomes the world except the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?

These five verses contain three themes. There is the theme of faith. There is the theme of love. There is the theme of obedience.

These themes aren't new to this epistle. Faith, love, and obedience have been sprinkled throughout the entire book. In fact, we have seen all three of them together before in chapter 3 and verses 23 and 24. "And this is his commandment, that we believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ and love one another, just as he has commanded us. Whoever keeps his commandments abides in God, and God in him."

God's commandment to us is to believe. God's commandment to us is to love. God's commandment to us is to obey. These three themes are three characteristics of a true follower of Jesus Christ. A genuine Christian will have faith in the Son of God. A genuine Christian will have love for God and for others. A genuine Christian will obey God's commands.

You fail to have any of these qualities, and you expose yourself as one who is not a disciple of Jesus Christ. You identify these qualities in your life, and you can have assurance that you are indeed a child of God.

This is what John has been getting at in his entire letter. It's all about assurance. It's all about knowing that you have eternal life.

1 John 5:13

I write these things to you who believe in the name of the son of God that you may know that you have eternal life.

And you can know that you have eternal life! So, throughout this short book, John gives us ways to test whether or not we have eternal life. Each test falls into one of three general categories. There is the Obedience test. There is the Love test. There is the Doctrinal test. The easy way to remember this is to remember the word, "OLD" – O (Obedience), L (Love), D (Doctrine)."

The test goes something like this. Are you obeying the Lord? If so, you can have assurance that you have eternal life. If not, you won't have assurance that you have eternal life. We can see this test in such verses as 2:3-4, ...

1 John 2:3-5

And by this we know that we have come to know him, if we keep his commandments. Whoever says "I know him" but does not keep his commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him, but whoever keeps his word, in him truly the love of God is perfected. ...

See, it's not what you say that makes it true. But, it's what you do that makes it true.

The love test works the same way. Are you loving God? Are you loving others? If yes, then you can have assurance that you have eternal life. If not, you won't have assurance that you have eternal life. We can see this in chapter 3 and verses 14-15.

1 John 3:14-15

We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brothers. Whoever does not love abides in death. Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him.

If you love the brothers, then you know that you have passed out of death into life. If you hate your brother, then you do not have eternal life. Regardless of what you say, it's a matter of checking out your life.

The doctrinal test works the same way. Do you believe in the real Jesus? Do you believe in the Jesus who has the power to save? Yes? Then you can have assurance that you have eternal life. But if you are believing in a made-up Jesus, one who has no power to save, because he doesn't exist, then you won't have assurance that you have eternal life. The clearest place of this is in chapter 2, verses 22-23.

1 John 2:22-23, 25

Who is the liar but he who denies that Jesus is the Christ? This is the antichrist, he who denies the Father and the Son. No one who denies the Son has the Father. Whoever confesses the Son has the Father also. ... And this is the promise that he made to us—eternal life.

Do you confess that Jesus is the Christ? If you do, then you have the promise—eternal life. But, if you do not confess the Son, then you don't have the Father. And if you don't have the Father, you don't have eternal life.

Now, today in our text, we see the same OLD three themes -- Obedience, Love, and Doctrine. Only, we are calling the doctrine test, "Faith," as it speaks about "faith" in the true God. And, we see them in the opposite order. Faith, Love, and Obedience. If you want to remember this order, simply remember the word, "FLO."

And so, this morning we have three questions. Do you believe in the Son? (i.e. do you have faith?) Do you have the love of the Father? (love) Do you obey his commands? (obedience) Let's look at the first question. And I'm going to change it a bit to fit our text.

1. Do You Believe in the Christ? (verse 1a)

Look at verse 1, ...

1 John 5:1

Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been born of God.

There it is. There's the gospel. It's those who believe in Jesus who are born of God!

It's not through works or ritual or efforts of your own. No, it is through faith alone. We are saved by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone. Believe in Jesus and you will be saved! Or, as this text says, you will be born of God.

Notice here how John picks up the same terminology that Jesus used with Nicodemus in John 3. He knew all about that interaction, because he wrote it down in John chapter 3. In that chapter, Jesus was speaking with Nicodemus. And he said, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God" (John 3:3). That is, being born from above. That is, being born of God.

Jesus is talking about a change in our lives that is comparable to being born all over again. It was mysterious to Nicodemus, who said, "How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?" (John 3:4). And we must admit that it is a bit mysterious to us as well. But, John seems to take a bit out of the mystery.

Look again at verse 1, paying particular attention to the grammar of the passage. It says this

1 John 5:1

Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been born of God.

The point here is that faith is evidence. It is evidence that you are indeed born of God. It is impossible for you to believe that Jesus is the Christ unless you have been born of God.

Do you believe? Do you believe that Jesus is the Christ? Do you believe that Jesus is the Messiah? Do you believe that Jesus is the Savior? This is evidence that God has worked a change in your life.

And many of us here in this room have experienced such a change. Where once the world was simply this world. But, then we saw the greater reality. We saw the reality of a gracious God who lovingly sent his Son to die upon a cross for our sins. And it all made sense to us. And we began to have new desires. And we began to want to live for him! It's because God had worked a change in our lives.

And the evidence of that change is faith. And John so wants us to believe!

Do you remember the purpose for the gospel of John? John wrote a biography about Jesus with the purpose of convincing us that Jesus is indeed, the Christ, the Messiah, the Savior. And as we believe, we will have life in his name. "Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name" (John 20:30-31).

In other words, there was much about the life of Jesus that John could have recorded. But, he recorded those in the gospel of John to convince you "that Jesus is the Christ." John wrote about the water Jesus turned into wine, that you might believe. John wrote about healing the official's son who was dying, that you might believe. He wrote about the healing of the paralytic at the pool called Bethesda, that you might believe. He wrote about the feeding of the 5,000, that you might believe. He wrote about how Jesus walked on water, that you might believe. He wrote about the blind man that Jesus healed, that you might believe. He wrote about the raising of Lazarus from the dead, that you might believe.

John recorded the words of Jesus, that you might believe. John recorded how Jesus said, "I am the bread of life," that you might eat of that bread. John recorded how Jesus said, "I am the light of the world," that you might believe in that light. John recorded how Jesus said, "I am the door," that you might enter through that door into life. John recorded how Jesus said, "I am the good shepherd," that you might trust in him. John recorded how Jesus said, "I am the resurrection and the life," that you might live! John recorded how Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life," that you might go to the Father through him. John recorded how Jesus said, "I am the true vine," that you might be connected to him for life.

And as we believe and trust Jesus with these things, we will live. "...but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name" (John 20:31). Do You Believe in the Christ? (verse 1a)

Well, let's move on to my second question this morning.

2. Do You Have the Love of the Father? (verses 1b-2)

1 John 5:1-2

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. By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and obey his commandments.

The logic of these verses goes like this: If you love the Father, you will love his children. And you love the children of God when you love the Father. It's circular, right? If you love God, you will love his children. If you love his children, you will love God. That's why I framed my

question the way that I did.

2. Do You Have the Love of the Father? (verses 1b-2)

In other words, is God's love evident in your life? See, this is the essence of what John is getting at in these verses. He's saying, "Look at your life. Do you see faith? That's a good thing. That's an evidence that you have been born of God. That's an evidence that you are a child of God. Do you see love? Do you see that you are loving other believers? That's a good thing. That's an evidence that God's love is in you."

And so, you say, "What does that look like?" There are lots of things. In a marriage, it looks like self-sacrifice. It looks like considering the needs of your spouse above your own. It looks like cleaning and vacuuming. It looks like verbalizing your love for your spouse, and how appropriate to do so today, on Valentine's Day. This is a day that our nation (indeed, our world) sets aside to celebrate marital love! And marital love will express itself in words and actions.

What does that look like? In a friendship, it looks like self-sacrifice. It looks like extending yourself for the sake of others. It looks like serving one another, even when it's inconvenient. It looks like encouraging one another with gifts and words of affirmation. It looks like laying down your life for your friends. Jesus said, "Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends" (John 15:13).

In a church, it looks like self-sacrifice. And for this, I simply want to read a portion from the book that you will receive today, "How to Walk Into Church" (by Tony Payne). He talks a bit about how this might express itself in the assembly. Tony Payne writes, ...

Loving the people around you at church can also be expressed in the little things—like the thoughtfulness that notices the person next to you doesn't have a Bible, and offers to share. It's expressed in a servant-hearted attitude that does whatever it can to help other around them.

For example, what do you normally do if you notice that it's a bit hot and stuffy in church? My tendency is to get a bit grumpy and then complain afterwards to someone in authority. But the loving, servant-hearted thing would be to quietly slip out of my seat and open a window, or find someone who can check that the ventilation has been turned on. Love sees a need and tries to meet it, rather than seeing a problem and doing nothing about it—or worse, complaining about it.

Another obvious example of loving thoughtfulness is in our care for newcomers. If we see someone who looks new, we should look after them. They're a guest at our family gathering. It's not the pastor's gathering; it's God's and ours. And just as God has so generously welcomed us, so we should welcome our guests. We should sit next to them, perhaps as a result of praying about where to sit. And we should be attentive to them, helping them find their way during the service. They might need help in following along, or they might need to be introduced to the [nursery] or the children's programs. We should treat newcomers like the honored guests that they are. [\[2\]](#)

Do you see these sorts of things in your life? If so, the love of the Father is in you. If so, you can be encouraged that you pass the love test. And passing the love test will lead to your assurance that you have eternal life.

Let's move to our final question this morning:

3. Do You Obey? (verses 3-5)

In many ways, this is an extension of love, because that's where John goes in verse 3, "This is the love of God, that we keep his commandments." Love will express itself in obedience. Faith will express itself in love.

It's enough to say that faith, love, and obedience are all a package. You can't really deal with them independently. You must deal with them together, to get the big picture. Let's read verses 3-5.

1 John 5:3-5

For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments. And his commandments are not burdensome. For everyone who has been born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith. Who is it that overcomes the world except the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?

John is here describing a particular sort of obedience. He's talking about the obedience that isn't burdensome. He's talking about the obedience of love. He's talking about the obedience that's motivated by love. There is a difference between the obedience of love and the obedience of servitude.

In other words, you obey your boss for different reasons that you obey your father. You obey your boss because you want a paycheck. You obey your father because you want to honor him.

And when it comes to the Lord, it is similar. God does not want for us to obey him because he is our boss. Though, indeed, it is true that God is our boss. He is our sovereign creator. He owns us. But when the people of God obey him as a boss, God will reject their obedience.

In Isaiah's day, the people were offering sacrifices, but God rejected them. God had commanded the sacrifices, but they were not offered willingly. They were offered out of duty. "What to me is the multitude of your sacrifices? says the LORD; I have had enough of burnt offerings of rams and the fat of well-fed beasts; I do not delight in the blood of bulls, or of lambs, or of goats. ... Bring no more vain offerings; incense is an abomination to me" (Isaiah 1:11, 13).

Likewise, our obedience to God should come because we can't help it. Consider the giving of Valentine's day flowers. If you go to the store and buy your wife some flowers, coming home to her excited, "Thank you, dear!" Do you say to her, "You're welcome; it's my duty?" Or, would your reply be, "I couldn't help myself. I saw them. They looked so pretty. I thought of you. I so wanted to give them to you and put a smile on your face!" That is non-burdensome love. Non-burdensome love is wasteful. It wants others to be happy. It is freely-giving.

There are many who confuse works and the gospel. I received an email this week from a man named Dan. His message read, ...

Message:

Quick question came up as I was checking out your church: I see that your senior pastor attended the Master's Seminary. Does your church teach Lordship Salvation (a la John MacArthur)? I strongly oppose MacArthur's teaching and identify with the Free Grace side of the argument. Would I fit in with your church? If your response is more than one or two sentences, I'll know something is wrong; so for both our sakes, please keep it short. Thanks.

My response:

I have recently been preaching verse by verse through 1 John, which contains a bunch of verses like this, "Whoever says 'I know him' but does not keep his commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him" (1 John 2:4; see also 1:6-10; 2:9-11; 3:6-8; 4:19-21).

My guess is that you would "strongly oppose" our teaching and would not "fit in" with our church.

He fails to understand the role of faith and conquering sin.

1 John 5:4-5

For everyone who has been born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith. Who is it that overcomes the world except the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?

When John speaks here of "victory," he is talking about "victory over sin."

This sermon was delivered to Rock Valley Bible Church on February 14, 2016 by Steve Brandon.
For more information see www.rvbc.cc.

[1] Tony Payne, "How to Walk Into Church," pp. 10-13.

[2] *Ibid*, pp. 49-50.