

Reading: 1 John 5:1-12

Theme: Joy and Obedience.

We have noted the 3 tests John had revisited a number of times - the tests of obedience, love and belief or faith. In chapter 5 we will see these much more intertwined and intermixed. John shows all who read this letter that Christianity is more than just having areas or compartments in our lives where certain things are fine, which we do and we can feel pleased with ourselves in those areas. These tests are not arbitrary tests, but they are to be as 3 fine coloured threads woven together so finely in our life's fabric that they cannot be unpicked or disentangled. While I have separated out these 3 tests to help us see them and note them for our lives, we are not to consider them in isolation from each another as they are given as a series of interwoven, complimentary tests of and in our lives.

The new birth we saw in v1 gives us new life, we are new creations in Christ. We don't usually measure life by a person's intelligence, abilities, exam results or productivity. A person is alive or dead. In my 2nd year at secondary school we learned the 7 signs of life - to see if a cell, an organism was alive (*MRS GREN - Movement, Reproduction, Sensitivity, Growth, Respiration, Excretion, Nutrition*). Yet life is more than just a list of 7 things.

Doctors now speak of treating the whole person - a holistic approach to medicine, so it is not just the physical symptoms they check but the lifestyle, the mental, emotional, stresses and pressures at home and work. John intended his teachings here to be applied to **all areas** of the life of a Christian. We are not to isolate or compartmentalise our lives and have Christianity affect only our church times, our Christian times. Christianity

and biblical teaching are to diffuse through and affect every area of our lives - finances, talk, language, thoughts, actions, desires, home life, social life, marriage, parenting, sport, social care and concern, life in the boardroom and even life in the bedroom. The life of Christ in us is to be part and parcel of the fabric of our lives to enrich and strengthen our lives in every area.

This will not occur all at once, nor will it occur automatically. A baby does not reach its full potential of strength and abilities overnight as he or she has to grow, develop, exercise and learn. The same is true with us in our spiritual lives as we also have to grow, develop and mature. Someone converted at the age of 60 is still only a young believer when they are 70. They will have 60 years of life experience to work through, process and maybe undo as they might have had little or no church background. We are not to demand of them the same degree of spiritual maturity of someone converted at 20 from a strongly Christian background who has been a Christian for many years.

We are not to expect of others, or even of ourselves, instant maturity and knowledge of Christian things. We are to recognise we **all** need to grow and develop as believers and we are **to keep on growing**. Thankfully it is not based on age, or our abilities at the age we are converted, of social standing or intellectual achievements, for the Lord can help us grow and mature in our grace, knowledge and love of the Lord Jesus and in our Christian faith. With such things said, let's look at v2-3 and see 2 things to help, challenge and encourage us all and to recognise all these are interwoven:

1. A Contradiction? (v2)

John wrote v2 and it appears to contradict what he said in 4:20 - that you show you love God by loving your brothers and sisters, but here in this verse it seems he says you really love your brothers and sisters by loving God! Has John got tied up in knots in the threads of his arguments? I do not think so as he was inspired by God the Holy Spirit and there is no contradiction in the statements, but note it is put as a question to make us think.

It is why I spent a bit of time speaking of the whole life view of these tests. It is not the one, then the 2nd one followed by the 3rd one, but all are to be going on, growing and developing in our lives constantly and together. These are not little boxes to be ticked like some spiritual checklist and not bothered with until next needed. These are living, interactive, inter-dependent tests that examine our lives - the new life of those who are born of God.

Hopefully these tests will expose those who are merely moral, good living, nice, religious people and show that they are not possessors of the life of God in their souls. Thankfully they are not designed to be used as a bundle of sticks with which a sensitive believer beats themselves. Rather they are to encourage us on as we see and apply them. The evidences are to be noted even if they are small and developing - for they present evidences, however small they are, of the new life of God in our souls. As I speak of such things, I know some sensitive believers will feel I am getting at them, while those who should be challenged by such will be unaffected by what I say.

Now here, as part of the evidence of new life, John is stressing that our brothers in sisters in Christ are loved aright when God is loved. I often use the picture of a triangle for marriage, with God at the top of the triangle and the closer the couple are to God the closer each partner are to each other. The same is true in the life of the church we belong to. If we are truly walking close to God, it will not puff us up, nor make us proud, haughty and disdainful of other believers, but it will cause us to love them as we will be closer to them. Our loving our brothers and sisters in Christ who we have seen will evidence our love to God who we have not seen. Yet our love for God will at the same time generate that love for each other as believers.

It is never one of the other. It is to be both. The greatest commandment and the next commandment are not independent but are linked, intertwined and inter-dependent. The more we rightly honour and love God, the more love for fellow believers will, should, perhaps even must, show itself. True love for brothers and sisters is grounded in love for God and we love those who God loves; because we see in them the work of His love and grace, but they are His children, our brothers and sisters and for His sake we will love them because He 1st loved us.

We are to be aware of the need to love God and our brothers and sisters. It is not one or the other, but both in place. At times we need the evidence of loving our brothers and sisters to demonstrate our new life budding and blossoming forth; but at other times our love for God is to be our main encouragement, yet both are to be present and evidencing themselves at various times. The evidences of love are not in isolation, are not some vague feelings which are not rooted in anything concrete, but

are anchored on and in God's word and obeying what He has commanded and so we see:

2. Joyful Obedience. (v3)

Truly loving God, not only results, evidences itself in loving other Christians, but also in carrying out, obeying, keeping His commandments. We are to recognise it is not a cold, clinical obedience, but a joyful and willing obedience - for His commands are not burdensome, grievous to us.

Many people disobey God - openly or secretly - which is tragic, but sadder is reluctant, grudging obedience from those who claim to love Him. God does not want us to disobey Him, nor does He want us to obey out of a cringing and superstitious fear. Paul wrote in 2 Corinthians 9:7 about cheerful giving to others, but I think God delights much more in cheerful living for Him!

If we love God then we will do that which pleases Him. It will be our aim to live in such a way that our greatest joy will be His smile and our greatest fear will be His frown. When we speak of glorifying God, living for God's honour, we are to understand and recognise that we are doing what pleases Him. God has not left us in the dark, nor to our own imaginations. He has revealed how He wants all people, especially His people to live. We have commands, instructions, examples in God's word. The 10 Commandments are a good place to start and we need to understand their positive and their negative outworking and implications e.g. to have no other gods before Him is the negative - we are to obey that in mind, heart and practice; the positive is to actively make the Lord our God, to delight in and enjoy Him. These 10 Commandments are not designed to spoil and hinder our enjoyment of life, but are Statutes of Liberty -

that we can live our lives in the liberty and joy of willing and happy obedience to our God.

In God's word we have the Maker's Instructions for the best running of our lives here on earth and for living for God. If we love God, it will not be just a matter of feelings, emotions, but it will have a strong moral fibre to it - "*I love God and I want to obey Him and do what pleases Him*" e.g. Joseph when tempted to commit adultery. We'll find we will not want to offend God, to trample His law underfoot, ignore His standards as if they did not matter.

Love is not opposed to obedience. It is not as if love is internal and the commands of God external. Both come from the same God. We do not "do things" to earn salvation, but if we are saved, born of God and are new creations, we love God's laws and commands because they are His, we want to please Him and they are not burdensome. Because of this we do not justify, excuse or reason that our disobedience is ok. The God of love never indulges the sin of disobedience. God's clear-cut law is for our good and benefit and we will do ourselves no good if we ignore that and excuse it as ok - for that is not loving God! To profess to love God and to habitually fail to keep on obeying His commandments is nonsense. We say one thing and then show by our action or inaction that we find His commands a burden, a chore and a bore! This will show our real attitude to God Himself.

What would we think if a newly married couple while on honeymoon and one of them entered into an adulterous relationship to the hurt and the sorrow of the other one? We

would, at least, have to question the love and the commitment that they had vowed.

God's Commandments are not to be burdensome to us, in fact they are to be as burdensome to us as wings are to a bird! They are the Statutes of Liberty in which we live in freedom and fulfilment as God intended us to do. The Lord Jesus doesn't want us weighed down with the crippling burden of a list of dos and don'ts. His yoke is easy and His burden is light (Matthew 11:30). We not to become Phaisaical and legalistic in the outworking of Christianity as we may become paralysed and crippled by fear of offending a rule or a way of interpretation.

The commands of God are for our good. Both Psalm 19 and Psalm 119 speak of the blessings of God's word and especially in Psalm 119 the psalmist speaks of his joy and delight in keeping God's word and commands. Yes, we may love God's commands, but we will soon recognise that we do not completely keep God's law and commands perfectly and we can feel rotten about it, even a miserable failure. Join the club, we and billions of other Christians throughout history, we are all in the same situation. We will never be perfect. John is not demanding or teaching perfectionism. In fact, he has already written of confessing our sin to God, that if anyone sins we have an advocate with the Father - the Lord Jesus Christ. Christians will keep God's commandments imperfectly but characteristically, for that will be the aim and the purpose of their life. We do not keep on habitually practising sin (3:9), but we do sin (1:8) and we are to confess it and God will forgive us (1:9) and He has even provided an advocate for us (2:1).

Our old sinful nature is at war with our new nature when we are born of God. At times we may feel wretched, a split personality, but we have a Saviour whose righteousness covers ALL our sin, its guilt and condemnation. Out of gratitude and love to God we will seek to keep, obey His commands. Keeping God's commands is to be done out of love for brothers and sisters. It is a family matter and we should do nothing to bring hurt to or shame on them.

We live out God's commands because we love Him and it shows in our lives with others. This means we will not covet, lie, steal or commit adultery or murder etc. because of the hurt and harm it does to others, especially believers and this keeping His commands pleases the God we love and should encourage others when they see the love and grace of God being evidenced in and through us.

The intertwining life tests are very searching practical ones and draws into sharp focus the contrast between a believer and an unbeliever - as love to God is expressed in joyful obedience from out of a loving, thankful heart. We may have been examined by this searching test, but I pray we would not be found wanting, and that it may encourage us as we see evidence of such an obedient love in place, growing and developing in our lives.