

## 1 John 5:1-3

**1Jn 5:1 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. <sup>2</sup> By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and keep His commandments. <sup>3</sup> For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments. And His commandments are not burdensome.**

In the first three verses of this section John is going to complete his message on love and then begin his closeout of this letter. In reading these verses, we have to ask the question as to what actually makes someone a Christian. John's simple answer is that "**whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God**". A person can believe many things about "God" and never be an actual Christian. They can believe that there is a God. They can believe certain things about God such as the fact that He is omnipotent and omnipresent. However, none of those things constitute salvation or conversion. In order to be saved a person must "**believe**" (*pisteuo*) which specifically means to entrust one's life to Christ. This verb means much more than simply believing something about someone. "*Pisteuo*" means that the individual is persuaded concerning and completely reliant upon and committed to the person of Christ.<sup>1</sup> Any other definition or meaning given to the verb "*pisteuo*" is a misdefinition and a mischaracterization of what it truly means. A person can believe all of the facts possible about Christ, but never come to a place in their life where they are fully committed to His work on their behalf. They can believe in Christmas and Easter, believe that the Bible is God's Word, and believe that the church is a good thing. They can believe that Jesus actually died for sin, but never ever be completely dependent on Christ for their salvation.

The word "**believe**" is one of the most important, and yet most misunderstood and misdefined words in the New Testament. People's eternal destiny hinge on this word. In order to be saved, a person must "**believe that Jesus is the Christ**" and fully and completely entrust their life to Him. The issue for many people is that they are more than willing to say that they "**believe that Jesus is the Christ**", but their personal definition of "believe" completely leaves out the element of entrusting their life to Christ. They have the intellectual part down pat, but volitionally they are not willing to truly entrust their life into the care of Jesus Christ. They still want to be in control, to define all of the goals and purposes for their life, and to live how they want to live, but displaying that attitude and that perspective on the Christian life is the clear evidence that the individual has never truly entrusted their life to Jesus Christ. In the culture of the American church, men have transformed true biblical faith into a distorted easy-believism that completely bypasses a genuine commitment of the individual's life to Christ. The institutional and cultural church has so misdefined the meaning and the nature of salvation that it no longer even has a biblical understanding of the most important reality in the Bible. What John means in this simple phrase is that entrusting one's life to Jesus Christ alone is the only way that a person can be saved. When someone truly believes, they are committing their whole life to Jesus Christ. They may not understand all of the implications of that decision, but they know, they understand, and they comprehend that apart from Jesus Christ that they are lost and doomed to eternal judgment. They know and understand that apart from Christ and His atoning work on their behalf that there is no salvation. They know that. God has revealed that to them and they fully embrace the work of Christ for them as the basis and foundation of their salvation. That is what constitutes salvation and nothing else.

Then to reinforce what truly constitutes salvation, John uses the phrase “**Him who begot**”. The word “**begot**” is “*gennao*” and simply means to procreate, to bring forth, and to conceive.<sup>2</sup> Clearly, this is something that God must do. The New Testament words are “**regeneration**”, “**a new creation**”, and “**born again**”. The word “**begot**” is not a word that is generally used, so some of the translations express this differently. For instance, the ESV, AMP, and NASB all say “**born of Him**”. The NIV completely misses this and says “**loves His child as well**” – which somehow seems like a weak translation and is more of an interpretation.

However, the word is speaking specifically of something that God does, so the verb is in the active voice meaning that God is the One that is bringing forth. Whatever makes someone a Christian is something that God does to them and for them, not anything that they do. Once again, the question would be “what could someone do?” The problem is that people always think that way – “*I go to church*”, “*I pray*”, “*I read my Bible*”, “*I was baptized*”, and the result is that they believe that they are the primary factor in becoming a Christian. The question, however, is how can they birth themselves, how can they “**begot**” themselves, or how can they “born” themselves.<sup>3</sup>

Now, because God is the source of a person’s salvation, it only follows that His salvation has a certain nature and characteristic to it. In v1, John gives a picture of what actually happens and reiterates the fact that believers love and care for other believers simply because they are born of God. That is one of God’s characteristics – to love people who do not deserve His love. The principle is simple - the life that God gives to the believer at salvation produces the life of God in the believer. [2 Peter 1:4](#) says that believers have been given a “**divine nature**” and because of that it produces divine attributes in the believer’s life. To be given the “**divine nature**” means that God does something very unique in the person who has been saved. This is not some kind of static or passive work of God, but is a real and actual spiritual transformation and conversion that takes place in the person’s life. Before this “**begot**”, they did not have God’s nature, but now they do. Now they have God’s inclinations and God’s dispositions governing, controlling, influencing, and impacting their life.

In v1, the verb for “**loves**” in the phrase “**also loves him**” is in the present tense, the indicative mood, and the active voice. So what John is saying is that the individual who truly loves God is loving and continues to love other believers. Then in [1 John 5:2-3](#) he strengthens the truth that genuine believers are obedient to the commandments of God for their life. Now, what we want to first notice is the phrase “**we know**” in v2. This is a phrase that John uses 15 different times (2:3, 2:4, 2:18, 3:2, 3:14, 3:16, 3:19, 3:24, 4:6, 4:13, 5:2, 5:15, 5:18, 5:19, 5:20). It is what believers “**know**” that makes them responsible and accountable to God. Every believer should be deeply encouraged that they even have the opportunity to be accountable to God. Just think of all of the individuals in the world who do not know Christ, who are not obedient to the Word of God, and who feel no accountability to Him at all. The tragedy of all of that is that one day they will stand before a holy God and give an account of their life to Him and they will be found to be totally lacking of any salvific merit whatsoever.

From a believer’s perspective, being accountable to God in a purposeful way is what actually gives meaning and value to life. Believers have the unique privilege of honoring God and of being obedient to Him in all the areas of their life. I am sure that we have all stated the same thing before, but it is very difficult to imagine what life would be without being rightly related to Christ. We look at people’s lives and watch them just meaninglessly meander through life without Christ and squander away the very

purpose for their existence. We watch them live their lives apart from Christ and simply live as they choose to live without any regard for Christ, for the Word of God, or for even a simple honoring of God in their life. Men who are utterly and eternally destitute continue to live totally absorbed with themselves, but never once even realizing the awful fate that awaits them apart from Christ. They are comfortable in unbelief, disobedience, and indifference to spiritual truth. They have learned how to make life without Christ a way of life that they fully justify and one unfortunately with which they find themselves completely content, secure, and happy. That picture is exactly why every believer should be thrilled that God has given them the privilege and honor of being accountable and responsible to Him. One of the most grievous tragedies in all of life would be for someone to assume that they have no accountability to God whatsoever. Every believer should be personally grateful that they are spiritually liable, accountable, and responsible for their behavior. This is one of the great privileges of the Christian life - to find ourselves accountable to the living God. It is one of the great privileges that we can be obedient to His Word and fruitful in our behavior in such a way that He alone is honored and glorified by our lives. So from John's perspective, it is a wonderful thing to simply "**know**".

In [1 John 5:3](#), John reiterates the truth that the way a believer demonstrates their love for God is not by simply saying that they love God, but rather by obeying God's commandments. Obedience to the Word of God is much more of a marker of genuine salvation than someone's personal confession. Certainly John has proven that just saying the right things is never a guarantee of salvation. Now, at this point is very important to make an observation in v2 and v3 relative to the word "**keep**". In both verses it reads in the NKJV as "**keep His commandments**", but the word "**keep**" is "*poieo*" in v2 and is "*tereo*" in v3. So in English it appears that the words would mean exactly the same thing, but in the Greek language they have two very different meanings. "*Poieo*" is the primary Greek word that means to "do" and in v2 it is in the present tense which means that the obedience is something that the believer is constantly doing. It is the same word in [1 John 3](#) that was consistently translated as "**commits**" or "**practice**" or "**sins**" (v4, 7, 8, 9, 10). It is something that an individual does repeatedly, habitually, continually, and consistently. It is the habit and practice of their life. However, "*tereo*" means to watch over something, to guard it by keeping an eye on it in order to preserve it.<sup>4</sup> In v2 what John is saying is that true believers consistently obey God. In v3, what John is saying is that the person who truly loves God sees their obedience to Him as something that is very precious and needs to be guarded in their life.<sup>5</sup> They understand that they must watch over their own life and their obedience to Christ. It is something that is vitally critical to them and their goal is to preserve and keep obedience at the very forefront of their mind and their heart. So, in v2 what John is referring to is the believer's actual obedience, but in v3 what he is communicating is the attitude that actually prompts that obedience in the believer's heart.<sup>6</sup> As John has consistently taught, a person's profession of love for God can only be validated when they are obedient to His commands. The difficulty that often arises is that individuals believe that love is primarily an emotional experience, so when they are around someone that is unlovable, they rationalize that their improper and ungodly attitude towards that individual is justified because of how they "feel". In reality, however, even though biblical love certainly carries emotion with it, the foundational element of biblical love is not emotion, but rather a commitment to the purposes of God for the believer's life.<sup>7</sup>

What is important in v3, however, is the simple declaration John makes that obedience to the commandments of God "**are not burdensome**". The idea behind the word "**burdensome**" is that if

someone actually obeys the Word of God that it will be an undesirable weight and liability on their life. In its noun form where it would be translated as a “**burden**”, it denotes something that presses in on a person in various ways. It is a word that is seen as making uncomfortable demands on a person’s life.<sup>8</sup> It is something in a person’s life that weighs them down in different ways. Some people, for instance, might think that caring for their elderly parents in their old age or caring for a mentally challenged and physically disabled child is “**burdensome**” to them physically, emotionally, and to their resources. The word carries the idea that something creates an inconvenience in their life. It disturbs them, troubles them, and is generally untimely. It becomes an aggravation and a nuisance and a hassle. Ultimately, it is something that is perceived as being oppressive and hard to bear in the individual’s life and that is the nuance of the meaning in v3 – oppressive, hard to bear.<sup>9</sup> [Acts 20:29](#) says,

**Ac 20:29 For I know this, that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock.**

The word “**savage**” is the same Greek word for “**burdensome**”. The AMP translates it as “**ferocious**”, the ESV as “**fierce**”, the KJV and ASV as “**grievous**”. The point is that it should be readily evident that the word has a very negative connotation to it, and unfortunately in v3 it carries the idea that some believers apparently think that being obedient to God is oppressive and grievous to their life. Obviously, when a believer has that perspective relative to the issue of obedience, it reveals a fundamental lack of understanding relative to their Christian life. It is important to notice a very important passage of what Jesus stated in [Matthew 11:28-30](#),

**Mt 11:28 Come to Me, all *you* who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. <sup>29</sup> 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. <sup>30</sup> For My yoke *is* easy and My burden is light.”**

In v28, the idea is that the individuals are becoming very weary and overburdened about various things in their life, and for whatever reason they have failed to understand what creates God’s “**rest**” in their life. The word “**rest**” refers to that which relaxes and refreshes the individual.<sup>10</sup> It refers to that which allows them in the midst of their labor and the actual burdens that life invariably brings to everyone to have a place that grants them the spiritual repose and respite that they need. Every believer needs this “**rest**” because it is what allows them to recover from the trials and difficulties that life imposes on them. In [Matthew 11:28](#) it is what calms someone who has become disturbed and distressed in their life. What Jesus is saying in these three verses is that the person whose life lacks genuine peace and security in the midst of difficult and stressful moments is someone who is being called on to become a disciple of Jesus Christ. It is only in Christ that a person can find rest, peace, security, and contentment.<sup>11</sup> The world does not have the ability to provide those attributes to a person’s life. In reading the New Testament, it is more than obvious that Jesus Christ does not weigh down His people with meaningless laws that do not speak to the heart. To the contrary, what He does is to provide biblical truth and principles that reveal God to the believer and therefore guides their hearts to Him.<sup>12</sup> The individual who believes that the commandments of God are oppressive and overbearing have never truly understood the heart of God, and in many cases probably do not even know God personally. The commands of God are not designed to burden the believer, but rather to direct them into the very life of God itself. The more disobedient that someone is to God’s Word, the more miserable their life will become, and they themselves will become discouraged, unhappy, and depressed. Disobedience only leads to misery and sorrow.

All around us life is falling apart.

- (1) Biblical values are being systematically undermined and removed.
- (2) School systems are removing all vestiges of the Bible from their curriculums and from their environment and have replaced it with mandatory courses on Islam.
- (3) Law enforcement officers have become the designated scapegoat for others unbridled lack of restraint and are unprotected by the institutions that hire them.
- (4) Children are being systematically dumbed down with right side brain only education.
- (5) Nations are competing for global military and economic domination.
- (6) National elections, rather than providing meaningful candidates with virtue and integrity in their life, are simply providing a choice between the lesser of two evils.
- (7) Racial tensions are increasing and may soon lead to civil war and martial law.
- (8) Banks and the corresponding economic system are on the verge of a total collapse.
- (9) The United States is accumulating debt at an unprecedented rate (\$20 trillion) and all of the hard work and careful savings of millions of well-intentioned individuals may be completely lost.
- (10) Christianity is being systematically removed from the culture and is seen as an impediment and hindrance to the global village and its one-world values.

Jesus vividly described these end time events in [Matthew 24:6-12](#),

**Mt 24:6 And you will hear of wars and rumors of wars. See that you are not troubled; for all *these things* must come to pass, but the end is not yet. <sup>7</sup> For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. And there will be famines, pestilences, and earthquakes in various places. <sup>8</sup> All these *are* the beginning of sorrows. <sup>9</sup> Then they will deliver you up to tribulation and kill you, and you will be hated by all nations for My name's sake. <sup>10</sup> And then many will be offended, will betray one another, and will hate one another. <sup>11</sup> Then many false prophets will rise up and deceive many. <sup>12</sup> And because lawlessness will abound, the love of many will grow cold.**

From everything that these verses foretell, it does not appear that life on planet earth will get any better. These end-time events will create enormous stress in people's lives, and especially in those individuals whose lives are not anchored in the person of Christ and the sovereignty of God. They will never have any "rest" in the midst of the trials. For the individual who finds obedience to Christ to be an unnecessary and needless burden, when stressful events become more and more frequent they will find themselves without peace, without rest, and probably without any meaningful direction for their life. Every believer needs to be anchored in the commandments of God and in the principles of God's truth that will never fail them. Every believer needs to constantly be finding rest and grace and peace in Christ for the difficulties that will invariably burden their life. How does this happen? Well, in [Matthew 11:29](#), Jesus encouraged his disciples to take up His "yoke". The word "yoke" is "zygos" and it means to become coupled with as a pair of oxen that are yoked together.<sup>13</sup> A yoke is what actually binds two things to one another. It was what made the two oxen walk together. The amazing truth that John wants

his readers to embrace is that a commitment to obedience is what yokes and binds them to Christ and what ultimately creates the foundation for spiritual rest and peace in their life.

## ENDNOTES

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- <sup>1</sup> Strong, 1314-1315.  
<sup>2</sup> Strong, 1023.  
<sup>3</sup> Lloyd-Jones, 567-568.  
<sup>4</sup> Strong, 1411.  
<sup>5</sup> MacArthur, 181.  
<sup>6</sup> MacArthur, 181.  
<sup>7</sup> Stott, 176.  
<sup>8</sup> Vine, 149.  
<sup>9</sup> Zodhiates, 324.  
<sup>10</sup> Zodhiates, 156.  
<sup>11</sup> Verbrugge, 45.  
<sup>12</sup> Akin, 192.  
<sup>13</sup> Strong, 1128.

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