

**This is the Love of God**  
**(1 John 5:1-5)**  
Expository Lessons from First Letter of John

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**I. Background and Review**

- a. In the prior lessons in this series we looked at John's teaching on the importance of loving others.
- b. Things we looked at regarding loving one another included:
  - i. God is love; this is one of the essential attributes of God's character.
  - ii. If we truly love God, we will reflect that character in our relations with others.
  - iii. Real Biblical love is much more than a feeling. It is compassion that follows all the way through to action: laying our lives down for our brothers.
  - iv. If we do not love our brothers (who we *can* see), we do not love God (who we *cannot* see).
  - v. If we do not love our brothers, we neither know nor love God.
- c. In the previous lesson we looked especially at two statements:
  - i. "No one had seen God at any time"; and
  - ii. "Perfect love casts out fear".
- d. The focus now shifts back on *what does it mean to love God*.

**II. This is Love of God: Keep His Commandments**

- a. Read **1 John 5:1-5**.
- b. "Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God."
  - i. As we mentioned in a prior lesson in this series, according to Irenaeus (bishop of the church in Lyons, in modern-day France, writing c. 180 AD) the apostle John in this text was addressing a gnostic-type heresy that was plaguing the early church.
    - 1. People were teaching that Jesus the man was not the same as the Christ, the Son of God; that the Son of God came down upon Jesus and it was the Christ, the Son of God (as opposed to Jesus) who was resurrected.

- a. (For more on this, see Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, book 3, chapter 16; found in Ante-Nicene Fathers vol. 1, p. 443.)
- 2. Here John is addressing that heresy by saying, “Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God”.
- ii. John certainly is not implying here that *all one needs* to do in order to be saved is to believe Jesus is the Christ. (In other words, John is not teaching a formula for salvation that implies that repentance, baptism, holiness and perseverance in the faith were not needed.)
- c. Loving God means keeping His commandments.
  - i. “For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments...” (**1 John 5:3**, NKJV)
  - ii. This is an unpopular statement in many Christian circles where many insist that they do “love God”, yet they clearly *do not* keep His commandments.
    - 1. This statement is similar to what Jesus had said:
      - a. “If you love Me, keep My commandments.” (**John 14:15**, NKJV)
  - iii. Implications of this.
    - 1. Just as real love for other people is demonstrated by action (laying down our lives for others), *the same is true for real love of God*. Real love for God involves action as well: obeying His commands.
    - 2. People who disobey the commands of God either do not know His commands, or they really *do not love God*.
      - a. The problem of many so-called Christians who believe in Jesus but don’t obey God’s teachings is that, in reality, they do not really love God.
    - 3. The ‘acid test’ for determining whether we love God: *whether or not we are willing to obey God’s commands*.
      - a. **Question:** Are you willing to obey *all of God’s commands*? Or do you want to narrow it down to just a few that your particular church group would consider the “major ones”?
      - b. The vast majority of Christians in the U.S. (and in the West) have no intention whatsoever to obey all the commands of Jesus, especially the hard ones.

- c. Examples of basic commands of God from the New Testament:
  - i. Honesty and integrity
    - 1. Do not lie.
    - 2. Keep your commitments, even when it hurts. Let your yes be yes and your no be no.
    - 3. Total integrity on the job. Work as one working for the Lord.
  - ii. Sexual purity and permanence of marriage
    - 1. Live a holy (set apart for God) life.
    - 2. Do not covet someone else's wife, husband, etc.
    - 3. No sex outside of marriage. No fornication, no homosexual sexual relations under any circumstances.
    - 4. No divorce except in the case of adultery, and no remarriage after divorce while your first spouse is living. Until death do you part.
    - 5. No lusting after others; no pornography nor worldly entertainment.
    - 6. Dress modestly, to protect the hearts of others rather than to draw inappropriate attention to yourself.
  - iii. More on Holy Living
    - 1. No drunkenness nor drug abuse (marijuana, etc.)
    - 2. No swearing nor profanity.
    - 3. No gossip nor slandering others.
    - 4. Avoid gambling, the occult.
  - iv. Loving others
    - 1. Be generous with those in need. Give to the poor.
    - 2. Husbands love your wives as Christ loved the church.
    - 3. Lay your life down to serve others.

4. Don't let the sun go down on your anger. Get reconciled with others.
  5. Forgive others as you want God to forgive you.
  6. Seek to bring the lost into the light. Share your faith with unbelievers, and pull straying Christians back.
  7. Love your enemies, do good to those who would harm you. Obey God rather than men: do not take up arms, even if the government wants you to.
  8. If others in the church are in serious sin, call them to repent and apply Biblical discipline if necessary.
- v. More on money
1. Don't be living for pleasure, consumed by life's worries, riches and pleasures.
  2. Pay all the taxes you owe; leave no debt outstanding.
  3. Don't covet what others have, nor be envious. Be content with what you have.
- vi. Devotion to God
1. Seek God. Devotion to prayer daily, reading and meditating of the Word of God
- vii. Biblical roles for men and women
1. Men to lead, teach and speak in the church.
  2. Men are heads of the marriage and family.
  3. Husbands love their wives as Christ loved the church; wives to submit to their husbands.
- viii. General attitude
1. Out of love for God, strive to find out what pleases Him.
  2. Get the plank of sin out of your own eye.
  3. If God shows you something you did not realize that He is calling you to do, study it out and do what it says.

- d. The commands of God are generally straightforward and basic. They can be seen (and understood) by practically anyone who is willing to read the New Testament and take what it says seriously. Also, a straightforward understanding of these teachings is confirmed by widespread testimony of early Christian writers (pre-325 AD). However, perhaps 90% of the Christian believers (Catholic, Protestant and other) in Boston do not follow these basic commands of God.
- e. **Question:** Why do people who call themselves Christians refuse to follow these commands?
  - i. In some cases, perhaps it is because they don't see anyone around them, in their religious circle, following these commands. (That is what I encountered in my own Catholic upbringing.)
  - ii. However, in many cases the real problem why believers do not follow the commands of God (according to John) is simply because *they do not love God*.
- f. Those who strive to follow all the commands of Jesus are called "legalists".
  - i. Those who want a relationship with God without obeying Him equate "loving God" with a warm subjective feeling in their hearts. They claim that those of us who are striving to obey all of God's commands *don't understand God's grace and love!*
  - ii. Well, *it really is all about love*. If you love God, you will obey His commands.
  - iii. When others locally attack and criticize us, we need to listen to what they are saying; however, let us be willing to challenge them back, when appropriate, on whether they really do love God.
- 4. Very few religious leaders, preachers and teachers are willing to call people to obeying the commands of God. They would rather tell people "what their itching ears want to hear" (**2 Timothy 4:3-4**) Yet the job of teachers and preachers is to know the commands of God and to call others to obey them.
  - a. From the Great Commission:
    - i. (Go make disciples) "...teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." Amen." (**Matthew 28:20**, NKJV)
  - b. From the **Hebrews** writer:

- i. (Speaking of Jesus) “...And having been perfected, He became the author of eternal salvation to *all who obey Him...*” (**Hebrews 5:9**, NKJV)
- ii. “Pursue peace with all people, and *holiness*, without which no one will see the Lord:” (**Hebrews 12:14**, NKJV)
  - 1. Holiness means living a life *set apart for God*, obeying His commands. Without this, the Scriptures teach, *no one* will see God!
- iv. From a famous sermon by 18<sup>th</sup> century preacher John Wesley, “*Holiness is Not Legalism*”:
  - 1. “‘Without holiness no man shall see the Lord.’ Nothing under heaven can be more sure than this, ‘for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it.’ And ‘though heaven and earth pass away, yet His word shall not pass away.’ As well therefore might God fall from heaven, as His Word fall to the ground. (**Hebrews 12:14**, **Micah 4:4**, **Matthew 5:18**).
  - 2. “No one who is not saved from sin here can be saved from hell hereafter. No one can see the kingdom of God above, unless the kingdom of God be in him below. Whoever will reign with Christ in heaven, must have Christ reigning in him on earth. And yet as sure as this is, and as clearly as it is taught in every part of the Holy Scripture, among all the truths of God, there is probably none which is less received by men.
  - 3. “Yes, professing Christians invariably invent one way or another to get to heaven without holiness. In the place of holiness, some have substituted penance, pilgrimages, and praying to saints and angels. Thousands of professing Christians have no doubt but that, by a diligent use of these things—without any holiness at all—they shall see the Lord in glory.
  - 4. (*Note: After demolishing many Catholics, Orthodox and Anglicans with the statements he just made, Wesley turns his attention to Protestants, and is even tougher! -CP*)
  - 5. “However, Protestants will not be satisfied in that manner. They are convinced that whoever leans on such things leans on the staff of a broken reed. Yet, thousands of such Protestants also think that they too will see God without holiness. How? Why, by doing no harm, generally doing good, going to church, and receiving the sacraments. And many thousands are content with this, believing they are on the high road to heaven. Yet, that is not much better than the hopes of the first group.
  - 6. “However, other Protestants recognize that such nominal Christianity is not sufficient. They correctly say that such a religion does not stand on

the right foundation. However, they go on to say that Christ has already accomplished and suffered everything for us. They say that His righteousness is imputed to us; therefore, we need none of our own. Since there is so much righteousness and holiness in Him, there needs to be none in us. In fact, they claim, that to think we have any holiness, or to desire to seek any holiness, is to renounce Christ. That from the beginning to the end of salvation, all is in Christ, nothing is in man; and that those who teach otherwise are preachers of legalism and know nothing of the gospel.

7. "What evasion! What has Satan done? He has persuaded the very men who receive it to 'turn the grace of God into licentiousness' (**Jude 4**). This is indeed a blow at the root, the root of all holiness, all true religion. The whole design of Christ's death was 'to destroy the works of the devil' (**1 John 3:8**). But now this is overthrown in one stroke.
8. "For wherever this doctrine of easy grace is received, it leaves no place for holiness. It forbids all such exhortations as might excite a desire for holiness. Nay, it makes men afraid of personal holiness, afraid of cherishing any thought of it. For they fear that any step toward holiness might be a denial of the faith, and a rejection of Christ and His righteousness. So that, instead of being 'zealous for good works,' good works are a stench to their nostrils. In short, they are infinitely more afraid of the works of God, than the works of the devil.
9. "Here is Satan's masterpiece! We are to believe that men are holy, without a grain of holiness in them! Holy in Christ, however unholy in themselves. They are supposedly in Christ, although they have not one jot of the mind that was in Christ. They are 'complete in Him,' although they are as proud, as vain, as covetous, and as lustful as ever. They think they can continue in unrighteousness because Christ has 'fulfilled all righteousness.'
10. "O you simple one, do not be deceived. For as surely as the Lord lives, 'neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God. Such', indeed, 'were some of you. But you are washed, but you are sanctified,' as well as 'justified, in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God' (**1 Corinthians 6:9-11**). You are really changed! You are not only accounted as righteous; you are made righteous.
11. "The inward power of the Spirit has made you free—really, actually free—from the law or power 'of sin and death' (**Romans 8:2**). This is liberty, true gospel liberty, experienced by every true believer. This is not freedom from the law of God, or the works of God, but from the law of sin and the works of the devil. See that you stand fast in this real, not

imaginary, liberty. Take heed that you 'be not entangled again,' by means of these vain boasters, 'in the yoke of' that vile 'bondage of sin,' from which you have cleanly escaped. (**Galatians 5:1**).

12. "I testify unto you, that if you still continue in sin, Christ shall profit you nothing. That Christ is no Savior to you, unless He saves you from your sins. And that unless it purifies your heart, faith shall profit you nothing. Oh, when will you understand, that to oppose either inward or outward holiness, under color of exalting Christ, is directly to act the part of Judas, to 'betray the Son of man with a kiss'?
13. "What? Make Christ destroy His own kingdom? Set Christ against holiness? Talk of Christ as saving His people in their sins? It is no better than to say, He saves them from the guilt, but not from the power, of sin. Will you make the righteousness of Christ a cover for the unrighteousness of man? So that by this means, 'the unrighteous' of every kind 'shall inherit the kingdom of God!' Stop! Consider! What are you doing? Who has corrupted you from the simplicity of Christ, from the purity of the gospel?
14. You did know, 'He who believes is born of God: And whosoever is born of God does not sin' (**1 John 3:9**). O come back to the true, the pure, the old gospel! That which you received in the beginning. Come back to Christ, who died to make you a holy people, 'zealous for good works' (**Titus 2:14**). 'Remember from whence you are fallen, and repent, and do the first works' (**Revelation 2:5**). For 'will you know, O vain,' O empty 'man, that faith without works is dead' (**James 2:17**)?
15. "Do not stupidly and senselessly call holiness legalism—a silly, meaningless word. Be not afraid of being under the law of God. Rather, fear being under 'the law of sin' (**Romans 7:23**). Love the strictest preaching best: that which most searches the heart and shows you wherein you are unlike Christ; that which presses you most to love Him with all your heart and serve Him with all your strength.
16. "Permit me to warn you of another silly, meaningless phrase: Do not say: 'I can do nothing.' If so, then you *know nothing* of Christ. Then you have no faith. For if you have faith, if you believe, then you 'can do all things through Christ who strengthens you' (**Philippians 4:13**). You can love Him and keep His commandments; and to you His 'commandments are not grievous' (**1 John 5:3**). Grievous to them that believe? Far from it! They are the joy of your heart.
17. "Show then your love for Christ by keeping His commandments, by blamelessly walking in all His ordinances. Honor Christ by obeying Him with all your might, by serving Him with all your strength. Glorify Christ



by imitating Christ in all things, by walking as He walked. Trust in Christ to live and reign in your heart. Have confidence in Christ that He will fulfill in you all his great and precious promises. That He will work in you all the good pleasure of His goodness, and all the work of faith with power. Cleave to Christ, until His blood has cleansed you from all pride, all anger, all evil desire. Let Christ do all. Let Him who has done all for you, do all in you.

18. "Exalt Christ as a Prince to give repentance, a Savior both to give remission of sins and to create in you a new heart; to renew a right spirit within you. This is the gospel, the pure, genuine gospel: glad tidings of great salvation. Not the new, but the old—the everlasting gospel."

- v. Some of the points Wesley made in this famous sermon of his include:
  - 1. Professing Christians have invented all kinds of ways they think they can get to heaven without actually having to obey the commands of Jesus; in other words, without living holy lives. They have tried to substitute things like:
    - a. Penance (punishing themselves)
    - b. Special prayers to saints or angels
    - c. Lighting candles, burning incense, special religious customs and rituals
    - d. Some things Wesley did not mention that I thought might be appropriate to include:
      - i. Giving money to a church
      - ii. Focusing on having a wonderful 'worship experience'
      - iii. Specializing in just a few of the commands of Jesus while ignoring or openly violating others. 'Specialties of the house' in churches today would include Christians and churches that focus almost exclusively on:
        - 1. Evangelism
        - 2. Social gospel of meeting the physical needs of the poor
        - 3. Building a supportive local church community with a full schedule of social activities for members of the family
        - 4. Specific outward signs of separation from the world

- vi. More on John Wesley and the Methodist movement that Wesley inspired (which began by emphasizing holy living and obedience to the commands of God).
  - 1. John Wesley was an Anglican priest. The movement he started eventually turned into the Methodist movement and the Methodist church.
  - 2. The largest denomination in the Methodist movement is the United Methodist Church (UMC), the largest 'mainline' Protestant denomination in the U.S.
    - a. Personal connection: my own father grew up in the Methodist Church.
  - 3. On January 3, 2020 it was announced that the denomination was planning to split over the issue of homosexuality and same-sex marriage. They came to mutual agreement that those who still hold to a Biblical view of marriage (as exclusively involving one man and one woman) will split off from the main body of Methodists to create a new denomination.
    - a. Those holding on to the Biblical position expressed dismay at the way events unfolded and asked, "Since the other group is the one that abandoned the Biblical position, and the one preached by John Wesley at the foundation of Methodism, *why is it that we are the ones who need to leave* and start a new group?"
  - 4. This has happened within less than 300 years of the time that John Wesley, the founding inspiration behind the Methodist movement, gave the fiery sermon on obedience and holiness! I am reminded of the words of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount:
    - a. "You are the salt of the earth; but *if the salt loses its flavor*, how shall it be seasoned? It is then good for nothing but to be thrown out and trampled underfoot by men." (**Matthew 5:13**, NKJV)
  - 5. I have seen the spiritual collapse of the Methodist church in the U.S., all of that occurring within my lifetime. It is amazing how fast a church movement can disintegrate when the foundation becomes shaky. The focus shifted from works of helping the poor to a social gospel and lost contact with the Biblical teachings on holiness.
  - 6. **To Consider:** Whatever we are now building spiritually, how will it last before Satan undermines it and someone has to *start all over again* with restoration and renewal?
- d. The commands of God are not a burden.

- i. “For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments. And His commandments are not burdensome.” (1 John 5:3, NKJV)
  - 1. **Question:** Do you consider any of God’s commands to be a *burden* to obey?
- ii. Similar to what Jesus had said:
  - 1. “For My yoke is easy and My burden is light.” (Matthew 11:30, NKJV)
  - 2. Note that a yoke is something that goes around the neck of an animal (such as an ox or donkey) to enable it to do work, such as pulling a plow.
  - 3. As David Bercot pointed out in a sermon I heard him preach last year, this passage is often misconstrued to advance the idea that the Christian life is “easy” (many evangelical Protestants assert that you *don’t really have to do anything*; just believe in Jesus). The Greek word translated “easy” in almost every translation here, *χρηστός*, is a word commonly used in the Septuagint (Greek Old Testament) and in the Greek New Testament. This Greek word generally means “good”. We can recognize the meaning of the word from how it is used elsewhere in Scripture.
    - a. For example, in **Jeremiah 24:2** in the LXX there is a contrast between the very “good” figs versus the very bad or rotten ones.
    - b. Paul also uses this word in **1 Corinthians**: “Do not be deceived: ‘Evil company corrupts good habits.’” (1 Corinthians 15:33, NKJV)
      - i. Clearly, Paul is *not* trying to say, “evil company corrupts *easy* habits”!
    - c. Luke uses the same word in the comparative form when comparing new wine versus old wine: “...no one, having drunk old wine, immediately desires new; for he says, ‘The old is better.’” (Luke 5:39, NKJV)
    - d. From these examples where this word is used, as well as in other examples you can find in the Scriptures, this word means ‘good’, in contrast with ‘bad’; instead of ‘easy’ in contrast with ‘hard/ difficult’.
  - 4. Jesus said his yoke and burden are not unreasonably heavy. It is a *good and appropriate* yoke for us to bear. He is not taking the yoke intended for an ox and putting it on a little donkey, where it does not belong!
- iii. Let us take Jesus at His word. Following his commands is good for us; it is a yoke to be borne, but it is a good and appropriate one for us.

- iv. Actually, Jesus also speaks about another yoke, a *burdensome* one consisting of *man-made religious rules*.
  - 1. In **Matthew 23** Jesus blasted the Pharisees, whose religion was all about impressing other people. Jesus referred to them “blind guides” who looked good on the outside but were full of greed, extortion and self-indulgence on the inside.
  - 2. Jesus said regarding the Pharisees, “...*they bind heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay them on men’s shoulders*; but they themselves will not move them with one of their fingers.” (**Matthew 23:4**, NKJV)
  - 3. Jesus denounced those who disregarded the commands of God and substituted man-made rules.
    - a. Read **Mark 7:1-13**.
    - b. Here Jesus makes his point by quoting from **Isaiah 29:13**. He drops the hammer on the Pharisees by using a phrase found in the LXX (but not in the Masoretic Text) that says, “*in vain* they worship Me”.
    - c. Instead of just following the commands of God, the Pharisees and other religious leaders were passing down man-made rules that were not found in Scripture.
    - d. Jesus said they were making the word of God “of no effect”. Their religious activities were a waste of time.
    - e. The yoke of Jesus is the only yoke we need. Let’s not be requiring people to take on any additional, man-made yokes!
  - 4. Let us study, learn and follow all the commands of God; striving first to emphasize the most important ones first (loving God and one another), yet not neglecting any of what we would consider the lesser commands. However, we must resist the old temptation to add man-made religious rules that have the outward appearance of spirituality.
    - a. This also will foster unity among all Christians. If we all focus on obeying all the commands of God without adding anything to that, we will sooner be more unified with one another!
- e. Thorough our faithful walk of following the commands of Jesus, which are good and suitable for us to bear, we can have the victory of faith that overcomes the world.
  - i. “For whatever is born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith. Who is he who overcomes the

world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?" (**1 John 5:4-5**, NKJV)