



1 John 5:1-5
Living Proof of Love

As we begin the fifth and final chapter of John's letter, we find him driving home his themes of obedience to God, love for God and others, and belief in the core doctrines of the Christian faith.

Time and again John has laid these three issues out as diagnostics for determining if we are truly Christians. He says the Christian faith is more than just creeds, more than just intellectual assent and understanding, it involves things we do BECAUSE OF what we believe. Right beliefs and right action belong together and provide outward proof of the internal change in our lives - the new birth - that God has brought to us.

John outlines it all again this morning:

1 John 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. **2** By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and keep His commandments. **3** For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments. And His commandments are not burdensome. **4** For whatever is born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith. **5** Who is he who overcomes the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?

Now, that's a lot to process, so let me summarize. John is saying that if I believe Jesus is the Christ, then I am born again. And because of that, I will love God and will love other people who are also born again, "**everyone who loves Him who begot also loves him who is begotten of Him.**"

In fact, I'll show my love for God by keeping His commandments, the greatest of which are that I would love God and love my neighbor like myself. My love for God is not just felt, it's practically demonstrated by keeping His commandments and those "**commandments are not burdensome.**" Having faith in Christ changes me, it sets me right, it leads me to live the life God has for me, and so, I overcome the world, which, apart from God, is headed for judgment and destruction.

All of this begins when I *believe* that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, because there's a whole lot of other things summed up in that.

As we have mentioned before Christ is the Greek word for "anointed", the Hebrew term is Messiah. Two separate languages, but one idea – someone specifically set apart for a special task or role; in this case, Jesus was anointed to save men from sin.

So, that's quite fundamental to Christianity, isn't it? Do you believe that men need to be saved? And then, do you believe that Jesus of Nazareth, born to Mary, was the One to do it? And that He was *the* Christ, not *a* Christ, not one of many great spiritual teachers through the ages, but *the* Christ, and that He *was* and *is* the Son of God?

Do you believe that Jesus has a relationship with God that is categorically different from any other person who has ever existed? He is identified here as *the* Son of God - again, not *a* Son of God, not this idea that we're all God's children. No, we're all made in God's image, and therefore discrimination against people on the basis of their appearance or where they were born or their mental or physical capability, or lack of it, is always wrong, but you're not actually a 'child of God' unless you can call Him "Abba, Father" and you can't do that unless you've accepted His Son, Jesus Christ.

So, do you believe that? Do you believe that Jesus is *the* Christ, *the* Son of God, and everything that implies about you?

Do you believe *you* need to be saved by God? Do you believe you, personally, not just all of us collectively, have sinned, and do sin? That you do things you should not do, and you don't do things that you should? And do you believe, have you really and truly and finally come to believe, that you can't change enough on your own, that you need God to do for you what you cannot do for yourself? And have you cast yourself in humility at His feet saying, "God, help me repent and forgive me for my sins, because You are the Christ, the Son of God"?

It's not enough just to understand all of this, to have heard it before, it has to sink down into your soul, you have to really know it and identify with it and you have to take action based on your belief.

If you are tired, you believe that lying down and taking a nap, or sleeping in will help, so you do it. If you are thirsty you believe that water will refresh you, so you drink some. When you are hungry, you believe that you should eat; when you are cold, you believe that putting on a jacket or going inside will warm you up, so you do it. If you're under water you believe you need to take a breath so you come up to the surface and you do it.

Friends, these are things that we really believe. And the actions we take prove that we do.

Well, John is using the same logic here. If you believe this, you will do that, and the result is evidence, proof, that you really believe. In this case, proof that you really believe something that is profound and soul altering.

He says if you have tasted and seen that the Lord is good (Ps 34:8), if you have heard His judgment about life and sin and you've agreed, if you understand Who He is and what He has done to save, you will love Him. If you believe, you will act, and that action produces evidence.

How many of you have heard the song on Christian radio by the group For King and Country called The Proof of Your Love? ¹ (Link available below) The chorus drives home exactly what we're looking at here in 1 John. They sing

So let my life be the proof,
The proof of Your love
Let my love look like You and what You're made of
How You lived, how You died
Love is sacrifice
So let my life be the proof,
The proof of Your love

What comes out of us is a proof of what is coming into us, an outward display of the internal reality and it should look like this: a love for God that is manifested in great part by loving others.

This is all very important, and very unique. Christian love, Biblical love, Godly love involves knowledge and understanding. And so, as we've been saying so often recently, if you find yourself lacking in love, then seek to understand more of God, refresh your memory of who you are without Him. If you find that there's not enough love coming out of your life, ask yourself, how much love is coming in? How much are you paying attention to what God has done and is doing for you?

Familiarity really can breed contempt, and it is possible for the Christian who knows these things and REALLY believed them at one time to let them fade and slip from their memory. And as your memory fades, your love can fade too: first your love for God, and then your love for people. But when you understand who you are, who He is, and what He has done for you, it ignites you and propels you forward in the faith giving you the power and desire to keep God's commandments. The proof of our love is obedience, and one of the best places to look for that proof is in our relationships with others.

1 John 5:1 ... everyone who loves Him who begot (that's God) also loves him who is begotten of Him. 2 By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and keep His commandments.

Time and time again in this short book John has been stressing the importance of loving other Christians. If you love the God who gave you this new life, you should love the other people that He has given it to as well. There should be a familial love for other Christians, affection for each other based on what we both esteem.

Many years ago Madeleine and I were living in California and we were walking through the parking lot at Trader Joes. Madeleine was wearing a sweatshirt from the University of Virginia and a lady stopped her and smiled and said excitedly, "Did you go to UVA?" Madeleine told her she didn't but she had been raised in VA and loved the state and the

¹ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b-2dKOfbC9c>

lady gushed about how cool it was to run into someone who knew about UVA all the way out in California. They had this strong sudden connection, this bond, out of nowhere in a parking lot because of something they both loved.

Some of you have had similar experiences over an alma mater, a hobby, a sports team or a profession. You see someone wearing a ring, or an emblem, or a uniform, and suddenly, for no other reason, this person is automatically OK in your book because you have something in common. You know nothing else about them, in fact you might disagree fundamentally about other very important things, but you've got this one bond, and so somehow they're better than any other stranger.

Well, if you're willing to cut them slack and show them some kindness and warmth just because they like Golf, or Crossfit, or went to some school or flew some airplane or helicopter, or read the same blog and shop at the same store or follow the same diet, shouldn't you have some affection for the person who worships the same God???

Here's what should be happening: your love for God and my love for God should be pulling us into greater and greater alignment as time goes on creating this great reciprocal relationship where I benefit from you and you benefit from me as we both follow God.

This is something very important thing to understand: it's not just what I'm supposed to do for you, it's also about what I receive from you. God wants to use the church and other Christians to help us navigate life.

We are meant to be connected to the family of God – so when you pull back or when you don't press in, you're missing out. You're missing out on the chance to bless someone else, to help them, of course, but when you withdraw, when you just duck in and dash out, when you give greater priority to all the other things you have to do, and you blame it on your schedule, or on the fact that you're an introvert, or because "there's nobody else there like me" you cut yourself off from people that could be serving, blessing, loving, you!

So be friendly, ask someone out to lunch with you, ask someone over for dinner, join a small group. Or just say hello to someone, remember it takes two to connect – people who want friends need be friendly. And as you connect, if you're both growing in Christ, you'll serve each other, bless each other, help each other because you love the same God. And, and this is super important – what you do for them, counts as obedience toward God, love for God, worship of God! When you reach out and connect with others, when you volunteer to serve, when you show up and help out – you're obeying God's commandments and showing His love!

But let me take you off to the side for a minute and tell you the truth. We have a commandment to love others. And that commandment, like the rest, is not burdensome. But it can still be difficult and involve sacrifice. Loving others is supposed to be an act of worship and obedience toward God; it's not just volunteer work or community service hours. It often involves giving up some of my time, talents, and treasures, for the sake of someone else.

So don't expect your ministry to be easy. Don't expect serving and helping others to be convenient. Don't expect it to always fit nicely within your budget or calendar. But do expect it to please God if you do it with the right heart. And, expect it to give you confidence in your faith. Expect the things you do for others to be the proof of your love, but don't expect it to be easy.

Now, in light of all that, let's take a look at this:

1 John 5:3 For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments. And His commandments are not burdensome.

That's a powerful verse, that's an important verse, that's a verse worth chewing on, underlining, highlighting.

But you have to notice something very important here - the verse doesn't say his commandments aren't *difficult*, it says they aren't *burdensome* - that word can also be translated as heavy, weighty, grievous, severe, or stern.

God's commands are not intended to feel like a heavy weight to be carried, or like overly strict barriers to ruin the fun in our lives.

Listen to how David describes God's commands in PS 19

7 The law of the LORD *is* perfect, converting the soul;...
8 ...The commandment of the LORD *is* pure, enlightening the eyes;
9 ...The judgments of the LORD *are* true *and* righteous altogether.
10 More to be desired *are* *they* than gold,
Yea, than much fine gold;
Sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb.
11 Moreover by them Your servant is warned,
And in keeping them *there is* great reward.

OK, that sounds great doesn't it? It sounds like the kind of thing I can agree with as I sit here on Sunday morning inside these walls. But when I walk out of here, and I face my daily life and all the various people in it, and all the things that are going on, all the decisions I have to face, well, sometimes God's commands do feel burdensome. The fact of the matter is obeying God doesn't come that naturally and isn't all that easy some times. What I see here in this verse and what I feel in my own life don't quite add up. Why?

Let me give you a few reasons why sometimes God's commandments do feel burdensome at times.

1. Because we don't understand what they're keeping us from. Make a note of this very important principle, *Sin isn't bad because it's forbidden, it's forbidden because it's bad.* God doesn't tell you to stay away from something that is good and then call it sin for no reason.

There is always a reason; there is always a consequence. God tells you to stay away from things that He knows will hurt you or hurt others in your life. God doesn't take good things and make them bad just by forbidding them; no He forbids things because they are inherently bad.

2. Because we don't know where they're leading. Things can feel burdensome when we don't know why we're doing them, or when we feel like we've been doing them for a long time. This is one reason God speaks so highly of Abraham – He told Abraham to pack up his things and get out of Ur in modern Iraq. God didn't tell him where he would wind up, He just said go. Friends, sometimes God doesn't tell you where all this obedience is going to take you, but that doesn't change the fact that He's calling you to go.

3. Because we think we know a better way. Commandments can feel burdensome when we think we understand what they're trying to accomplish and we feel like "that's a stupid way to do it," or that we see a 'better way' to get things done. But here's where we need to fall back on our basic theology: do we really think we're that much better than God? Do we think we have honestly figured it all out from our end? Do we think we're in the best position to make that judgment?

Peter thought he had a better way to save Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane and wound up lopping a guy's ear off. So in the middle of getting arrested, Jesus has to heal someone too.

James and John thought they knew a better way to respond to a village that didn't receive Jesus, so they asked if they could call down fire from heaven to consume the place and Jesus told them (Luke 9:54-56) ["You do not know what manner of spirit you are of. 56 For the Son of Man did not come to destroy men's lives but to save *them*."](#)

While Moses was leading the people of Israel through the desert on the way to the Promised Land, the people got thirsty and God was going to work a miracle to give them water. He told Moses to go and speak to a rock and miraculously water would flow from it. But Moses was angry about the whole situation and the way the people were grumbling and he was a little cranky himself, so he went and hit the rock with his walking stick instead. God gave the people water, but He told Moses he was going to die as a result and not enter the Promised Land with the children of Israel. And that's what happened.

Friends, God knows best. If He has a command, it's for a reason. Trust Him and obey.

4. Sometimes God's commandments feel burdensome because we think we have to fulfill them alone. We forget that the Holy Spirit has come inside us and we forget to turn to Him for the strength to do what we've been called to. God's commandments always come to His children attached to His divine enabling. God's commands and His power are always linked. Jesus gave us the Great Commission (Matt 28:19-20). He told the Disciples to "go into all the world and make disciples of all nations." But He also told them to *wait* until they had received the divine power to do it.

Acts 1:8 But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.”

God never gives us a task to do without the power to do it. He does not set us up to fail.

But, even with the Holy Spirit living inside of you, it’s going to be rough at times. Talk to someone who’s been through a bomb blast or who’s been shot while wearing body armor. You still feel the earth shake, you still feel the pressure, you might even be bruised or possibly break a rib. You don’t die, the round, or the shrapnel hits what you’re wearing but it doesn’t hit you. You’re protected, but you feel it.

Well, when we’re operating in the power of the Holy Spirit, we still see smoke, feel a lot of pressure, even take a bruise or two, but He protects us, gives us strength and courage, and helps us do and survive things we could never handle alone. If you’re having a hard time obeying God’s commands, you need to at least consider: are you asking Him for help to do it or are you trying to grind this one out alone?

5. We forget that we have the example of Christ. I’m speaking specifically of the Incarnation here, the fact that God became man. He took on flesh and lived the life we’re living now. Satan tempted Him to neglect the Father’s commands, but He did not. And Hebrews (2:18) says since He has been tempted, **“He is able to aid those who are tempted.”** He knows what we’re going through, our God knows what it is to be human.

Heb 4:14 Seeing then that we have a great High Priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast *our* confession. 15 For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all *points* tempted as *we are, yet* without sin. 16 Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

Jesus experienced all the things we’re tempted by, maybe in different forms, but the desires of men and women through the ages have never changed, it’s only the way we seek to fulfill those desires that is affected by the times we live in. At root, the desires of the human heart and flesh have not changed through history.

Jesus also dealt with all the difficult things that make it hard to obey God at times. He dealt with disappointments, betrayal, heartache, rebellion, and all the other frustrations of life. And then His life ended with death on the cross. Friends, Jesus’ life didn’t go through a season of difficulty and then get better in the end.

We don’t all ride off into the sunset and live happily ever after. Most of disciples shared similar difficulty and early deaths, being martyred for their faith in Christ. There is precedence in the Christian faith for things being difficult for a long time, but that doesn’t mean God abandons you in the process.

He may seem distant, He may not seem to answer, but He is there. Keep calling out, keep trusting Him, and keep your eyes on others and how you can love them, even in your difficulty and pain.

If you're doing the right things, for the right reason, you'll have assurance in your walk with God. You understand who He is, what He has done, you allow that to change you, and then you go and show others love because:

4 For whatever is born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith. 5 Who is he who overcomes the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?

I love the words of William Barclay here:

“We have the indestructible hope of final victory. The world did it's worst to Jesus. It hounded him and slandered him. It branded him a heretic and friend of sinners. It judged him and crucified him and buried him. It did everything humanly possible to eliminate him—and *it failed*. After the Cross came the Resurrection; after the shame came the glory. That is the Jesus who is with us, one who saw life at its grimmest, to whom life did its worst, who died, who conquered death, and who offers us a share in that victory which was his. If we believe that Jesus is the Son of God, we have with us Christ the Victor to make us victorious.”²

Friends, life is hard, but God is good. Don't get that backwards.

God has demonstrated His love to us, and now He's asking us to receive that love, experience that love, allow that love to change us, and then to reflect that love into the lives of those around us. If you really understand who He is and what He has done, you will want to obey Him. It won't be easy, but it's not impossible either, in fact, it will drive you closer and closer to Him as you realize there's no way to do it alone.

You can overcome the difficulties, the trials, the issues of this world, but only in Christ. Run to Him, live for Him, love for Him and let your life be the proof of His love.

Let's pray.

² William Barclay, *The Letters of John and Jude*, (Rev Ed.), 106.