

1 John 5:1-5

“Blessed Or Burdened?”

“Who is my neighbor?” It was the question of a certain lawyer who one day stood up to test the Lord. He wanted to know what he needed to do to inherit eternal life; Jesus said to Him, “What’s written in the law? What’s your reading of it?” (“What do you *think* you need to do according to God’s word?”) The lawyer said, “‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind,’ and ‘your neighbor as yourself.’” Jesus said, “You’ve answered rightly; do this and you will live.” But the lawyer wanting to justify himself, said to Jesus, “*And who is my neighbor?*”

By the way on a quick side note when you’re standing before the Lord and find yourself seeking to *justify yourself*, you’re already in an unhealthy position. But he was looking for some clarification (slanted toward his own justification though it may be), he felt as though he needed to know, “Hey, if I’m to love my neighbor as myself, then I need to know who qualifies as my neighbor.” Of course that’s when Jesus launched (Luke Ch 10) into the parable of the Good Samaritan whereby He taught the lawyer that it’s not so much about who’s my neighbor as it is who can I be a neighbor to.

As we segue out of Ch 4 and make our way into the homestretch of 1st John here in Ch 5 there’s a similar feel that’s found as this Ch begins. Often times we get the idea that as a Ch changes so does the topic at hand or the principle being addressed, but in reality that’s not always the case. You recall from our time together last week that as we were coming to a close John was speaking of the necessity of love as it pertains to our relationship with one another in the body of Christ. That if you’re going to say, if I’m going to say, “I love God” yet have this unceasing seething for my brother in the Lord, if I hate my brother or my sister in the body of Christ, than the fact is that I don’t really love God! Because if you’re a believer, and I say that I can’t love you, yet I claim to love God, I’m just lying about my love for God. Because as we read in Vs 21 of Ch 4, “...he who loves God *must* love his brother also” it’s a non option.

This is where the sense of similarity comes in for me to the situation there in Luke Ch 10 between Jesus and the lawyer. Because it’s almost as if John anticipates the question, “And who is my brother? If loving God means loving my brother, than let’s make it clear, who is my brother?” In this passage before us today John takes on who it is that qualifies as a brother/sister in the Lord and a real time benefit of being a believer.

Vs1-5

Let's go back and read beginning in Vs 20 of Ch 4 through the 1st Vs of Ch 5 (read). You see when you keep the passage in tact you can sorta keep the context a little more cohesive. Who is my brother whom I must love? In short, if they're "born again" they're your brother or your sister; they're apart of the family of faith and as such you must, I must love them. Of course with the concept of being born again we're taken all the way back aren't we; to the grass roots, fundamentals of the faith.

John has mentioned various things throughout his letter that will be typical of a child of God; i.e. he/she won't practice sin, they'll practice righteousness, they love other Christians, they'll deal in truth; but here he mentions how it is that one actually *becomes* a child of God; and I for one am glad he brings it up lest we be tempted to think that in doing all those other things that somehow qualifies us, or ratifies us as being right with God.

That's how the majority of the planet thinks isn't it? They think that if they're to be right with God they need to somehow punish themselves for their sins, or they need to do extraordinarily great things, they need to throw their babies in the Ganges river, or crawl on their hands and knees an exorbitant distance, they need to climb mountains or have themselves crucified. All kinds of things that people do in the name of seeking to make themselves right in the sight *of* God, to find themselves accepted *by* God; yet the bible declares that in order for us to be seen as righteous *before* God we have to be *born of* God.

"Well that's great to know, but how does that happen?" That was the question Nicodemus asked wasn't it? There in John Ch 3 when he came to the Lord by night seeking a personal and private interview with Jesus. Jesus said, "Let's cut the small talk Nick, if you want to enter the kingdom of God you've got to be *born again*." Nicodemus said, "What do you mean 'born again' I'm an old man, how can I enter my mother's womb a 2nd time and be born again?" Jesus said, "Are you the teacher of Israel and yet you don't understand what I'm saying? You're reasoning in a physical sphere, but I'm speaking on a *spiritual* level; you've got to be born again of the *Spirit*." Nicodemus said, "I don't understand..." I'm not sure why it is that the idea of being born again of the Spirit is so foreign to us but it is. I mean think about it, the idea of being born in order to experience and enjoy life is all we've known, there's no other means that we're aware of whereby life is brought forth outside of birth.

If it's so easy to connect that dot on a physical level why is it so strange for us to reason that way on a *spiritual* level? There's only one way to become a part of the family of man/mankind; you've got to be *born* into it. Guess what; there's only one way to become a part of the family of God, you've got to be *born* into it, not by a physical birth, (God is Spirit) you've got to be born again of a *spiritual* birth. How does that happen? Vs 1, "Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is *born of God*."

The word "believes" here being the hinge that opens the door to salvation, being born of God. Equally important being what or whom I believe *in*, where I place that belief; it's belief in the fact that Jesus is the sinless Son of God; the "propitiation" for our sins (Ch 4 Vs 10) and the "Savior" of the world (Ch 4 Vs 14). Now when we consider this word "believes" forgive me if I overstate the obvious but we need to recognize here that what is *not* in view is a simple mental assent to a matter of fact. Find me a single demon who doesn't believe that Jesus is the Christ. You can't; they all believe (and tremble). Noted Greek Scholar Kenneth Wuest says here, "this belief is not a mere intellectual assent to the fact of the incarnation, but a heart acceptance of all that it implied in its purpose, the substitutionary death of the Incarnate One for sinners, thus making a way of salvation in which God could bestow mercy on the basis of justice satisfied. That person, John says, and he uses the perfect tense here, has been born of God and as a result is a child of God."

This belief goes beyond something that's in my head and finds its resolve in my heart. Now, when that happens there will be certain attributes that begin to pop up in my life; the one that John is emphasizing here is that I will have a practical show of love *in* my life, *through* my life for my brothers and sisters in Christ. If I love Him who *begot* (God), then I will love those *begotten* of Him (other believers, the family of faith).

Not only the ones whom you think are cool, or perhaps they're popular or somehow bless your life, it's easy to love at that point. Where the true test comes in is when there's really nothing in it for me, maybe I don't consider that person super cool or beyond that something about that person seems to grate on me or rubs me wrong. That's when the true test of love enters the equation. But the bottom line is that we have a common bond in Christ, we share the same Father in heaven; that makes us family and as family it's to come naturally, I love you and you love me. We may not always get along perfectly (at least on this side of eternity) but we're family nonetheless and as such we're to love one another.

There's no choice in the matter, if you love God you'll love the family of God, regardless of their denomination, their ethnic group, social status, net worth, political persuasion or anything else; (it's a birthmark of being born again, you love others who've been born again).

Vs2-3

I like the way that John creates the airtight circle here showing how that one necessarily includes the other. Here's what he's saying here in these 1st couple Vs, "I can know that you are *born* of God when you believe that Jesus is the *Son* of God resulting in your love for the *family* of God; and I'll know that you love the *family* of God when you love God as evidenced in your obedience to His word." All of these things work together and you can't have one without the other; if you love God you'll love the children of God, and if you love the children of God you love God; and I'll know you love God when you keep the *word* of God. In other words our love for God isn't demonstrated in empty words but by willing works; not like slaves obeying our master, but like children obeying our Father.

John says, "By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God..." The idea being that this is the proper motive for loving the people of God. We as people might be prone to love others for all kinds of reasons (we mentioned popularity, personal benefit of some kind); God wants us to love each other out of our love for Him, out of obedience to Him.

Vs3, "For this is the love of God..." you might understand that like this, "This is what love for God looks like..." "that we keep His commandments, and His commandments are not burdensome."

Couple things to consider here: 1st of all John says, "This is the love of God, that we keep His commandments." It would seem obvious that John probably had the words of Jesus in mind here when He said, "*If you love Me, keep My commandments.*" John 14:15

And again, "*If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our home with him. He who does not love Me does not keep My words; and the word which you hear is not Mine but the Father's who sent Me.*" John 14:23-24 If you say you have a love *for* God, yet walk in conscious disobedience *to* God you're lying (that's what John said back in the 1st Ch and the 6th Vs of this letter). You can't say you have fellowship with God (Who is light) and yet walk in darkness; they're mutually exclusive positions.

Love *for* God will show itself in obedience *to* God. Jesus said it like this, “You’ll know them by their fruits, good trees can’t bear bad fruit, bad trees can’t bear good fruit.” It’s so plain, yet it’s a blight on America’s cultural Christianity; so many people profess to be Christians who have no idea what the bible even says much less actively pursue obeying it because they’re so in love with God... John would want to grab that person up by their proverbial lapels, throw some cold water in their face and say, “Wake up man!” Just saying you’re a Christian, claiming to believe in Jesus doesn’t make someone ok with God. If you love God it will show itself in your obedience to the *word* of God, His commandments.

“And [notice, #2] His commandments are not burdensome.” “Does it really say that?” Yeah it says exactly that, underline it, “His commandments are not burdensome.” Now it doesn’t say they’re not a burden, in that it’s never difficult, but that they’re not burdensome, they don’t impose a burden on you; why not? Because you love God and love always lightens the load. Listen, disobedience to God’s word is tragic – but equally tragic is, reluctant, grudging, guilt ridden obedience. Remember what Paul wrote about our financial giving? He said this, “...*not grudgingly or of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver.*” 2 Cor 9:7 If you can’t give because you love the Lord, and want to be a blessing *to* the Lord, than just keep it; God doesn’t want our giving to be tempered by a grudge or by guilt. Now listen, what applies to our *giving* applies equally to our *living*; God doesn’t want obedience grudgingly or out of guilt; it’s *His* heart that obedience to His word should delight *our* heart; because we love Him and want to be pleasing *to* Him.

You see, what’s your attitude toward the word of God; is it a drag; or is it a delight? The psalmist said, “*The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul; The testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple; The statutes of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart; The commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes; The fear of the Lord is clean, enduring forever; The judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether. More to be desired are they than gold, Yea, than much fine gold; Sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb. Moreover by them Your servant is warned, And in keeping them there is great reward.*” Ps 19:7-11 What an incredible insight and appropriate attitude toward the word of God. The longest Psalm in the bible (119) is all about the word of God, how the psalmist loves it, benefits *by* it and is anything *but* burdened because *of* it.

God's word to us is His *gift* to us, it's the manufactures handbook for life instructing us on the single most fulfilling and joyous life possible. Think about the various religions of the world and the things that people are bound by; it's true religion is burdensome, it is hard to bare (Matt 23:4), but by contrast Jesus says, "Hey, love Me, and love My people" is that too much for ya? How much less do you want?

Love lightens burdens. Remember the story of Jacob and his desire to marry Rachael? But back then you needed a dowry (sorta alimony in advance for the father), Jacob had left home with nothing because of a bit of a family skirmish so Laban said, "I'll tell you what, you work for me for 7 yrs with out pay and you can marry my daughter Rachael." I'm not going to ask for a show of hands but I wonder how many men today would take that deal; "Hey man, there's other fish is the sea, I'm not going to work for 7 yrs with no pay just to marry your daughter." But Jacob took the deal, he didn't even have to think twice about it; and the book of Genesis records this for us, "*So Jacob served seven years for Rachel, and they seemed only a few days to him because of the love he had for her.*" Gen 29:20 Seven labor intensive years seemed like only a few days to him because of the overwhelming love he had for her in his heart. Love lightens burdens. Even so when you love God His word isn't a burden for you, it's a blessing, serving Him isn't obligation, its blessed opportunity. Now if you're not born of God, it'll be a definite burden, but when God calls you He equips you, if He enlists you He'll enable you; love lightens the load.

Vs4

Now you might not note this is the way we're kinda stopping along the way but I would point out that John speaks of obedience to God's word 3xs in this passage and he speaks of overcoming the world 3xs in this passage. Here's my point, obedience to God's word and overcoming the world are inseparably joined together. The word "overcomer" isn't a special class of Christians it's simply another name *for* a Christian, the 2 terms are interchangeable.

"Whatever is born of God *overcomes the world.*" The word "Whatever" is in the neuter gender meaning that it has universal application; it applies to anyone and everyone, male, female, Barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, if you are born again you are an overcomer; period. Think about it, your position is in Christ, Christ has overcome the world; He said, "*In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.*" John 16:33 He's seated at the right hand of God His enemies having been made subject to Him; now if you be in Christ and Christ has overcome than you are an overcomer in Him. Victory isn't found in a program, but in a person, the Person of Jesus Christ who has overcome the world.

Now you should note that the verb “overcome” here implies a battle, be it the forces of the world-system, the depraved nature of the flesh, or the devil and his cohorts. Tribulation and temptation is a reality in this world, it’s a battle, but the habit of life for the believer is to be victory, not defeat. Doesn’t mean you never fail, but to succumb to sin is the exception in the child of God’s life, not the norm.

“And this is the victory that has overcome the world -- our faith.” Now again I want to spend a quick second here considering the idea of victory; we consider victory with a view toward eternity. It doesn’t mean that you will never be persecuted or dealt with wrongly or unfairly; read Hebrews Ch 11 and consider well those who got the honorable mention in the scriptures “Hall of faith.” Sawn in two, fed to lions, tortured and killed, driven to live in caves...of whom the world was not worthy.

Someone has said that faith is not so much believing in spite of evidence, but obeying in spite of consequence. But here’s the deal; the end of Vs 4 and Vs 5 takes us intentionally back to Vs 1 because what’s critical is where our faith is placed; notice.

Vs5

You see “our faith” is embraced in the confession that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the Living God and all that, that confession implies. It’s an ongoing abiding kind of faith, it’s not an “I came to the altar and got saved” kind of faith, but it continues to trust Christ and rely exclusively upon Christ. That’s the life that experiences victory and overcomes the pressures, temptations and trials of this world. We overcome not because of who we *are* or what we *do*, but because of Jesus Christ whom we trust *in*. We’re more than conquerors (Rom 8:37) *through Him* who loved us and gave Himself *for* us.

Prayer Points:

Lord we thank You for the promise of victory that we stand upon in You. Strengthen our faith and our trust in You, help us to learn what it means to love You, give us a hunger to obey You. May Your word be the delight of our soul, that we would find Your word a blessing, not a burden; that we would walk in love and so keep Your commandments. God give us the proper perspective and forgive us for our so often self centered drive and desires. Teach us to crucify the flesh and walk in the Spirit and to obey You and honor You no matter what the cost...

If while we were considering this morning's text you were realizing that God's word does seem like a burden to you, not because you're simply wrestling with the flesh but because you've been trying to get right with God on the basis of what you do as opposed to resting in what He's done for you and you're realizing that you've sought to establish yourself works of legalism not works of love than let's take measures to turn that around right now. There's a vast difference between playing church and leading your life surrendered to the 1 true living God. One day the people were asking Jesus what works they needed to do in order to work the works of God and Jesus said to them, this is the work of God, that you believe on Him whom He's sent. It's not about what you do, it's about what He's done for you and you simply trusting Him for it, are you willing to do that today?