

Wednesday Night BIBLE STUDY

Wednesday, September 25, 2024 – First Baptist Church Buda
Midweek Prayer Meeting & Bible Study



THAT YOU MAY KNOW – A STUDY OF 1,2 & 3 JOHN *Vital Signs of the New Birth* *1 John 5:1-5*

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

BACKGROUND AND SETTING FOR 1ST, 2ND, & 3RD JOHN:

- (1) **AUTHOR = The Apostle John** – Tradition holds that John was sentenced to death in a boiling vat of oil, yet he emerged unharmed from the experience. Again tradition tells us that John lived into old age perhaps dying sometime after AD 98... He is thought to have died in Ephesus – But in fact the mystery and unknowns concerning John’s death and what happened to him are not known and are varied...
- (2) **DATE = A.D. 90-95** - As with most books in the Bible, we cannot know for certain when and from where these epistles were penned. As to a date, it is commonly believed to have been written close to the end of the 1st century, with a fairly wide possible time frame... somewhere between 90-95 A.D.
- (3) **PLACE OF WRITING = Ephesus** – It is believed by most Biblical scholars that John wrote these letters from Ephesus, the place believed to be where he died. It is usually accepted that John wrote them late in his life.
- (4) **RECIPIENTS = Different audiences** - The Epistles of John were written to various audiences. They were all written after John was an old man living in Ephesus.

(5) **PURPOSE = Multiple purposes** - In terms of a positive stated purpose, John actually gives us reasons why he wrote these epistles:

3 Stated Positive Purposes for These Letters:

1. **That your (our) joy may be made complete = 1 John 1:4**, *“⁴ And these things we write to you that your joy may be full.”* How may a Christian's joy be full if they lack assurance of faith, or if they are unsure that they are even a Christian and assured of salvation? Why do you think that is?
2. **That you may not sin = 1 John 2:1-2**, *“My little children, these things I write to you, so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. ² And He Himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world.”* What affect does sin in the life of a Christian have on his or her assurance? Why? What is John telling us here that might help?
3. **That you may know that you have eternal life = 1 John 5:13**, *“¹³ These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life, and that you may continue to believe in the name of the Son of God.”* Why do you think this (assurance) might have been a stated purpose of John's writing? Why so important?

“¹Whoever 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?” -1 John 5:1-5 (NKJV)

Pollster George Barna classifies the *born-again* as all who say “They have made a personal commitment to Jesus Christ that is still important in their life today,” and who also indicate that they “believe that when they die they will go to heaven because they have confessed their sins and accepted Jesus Christ as their Savior” (*The Barna Update* [3/5/2001], cited by Ron Sider, *The Scandal of the Evangelical Conscience* [Baker], p. 18).

➤ *By those criteria, anywhere from 35 to 43% of the U.S. population claims to be born again*

At first glance, those numbers might cause us to rejoice. But, as evangelical theologian Michael Horton laments, “Gallup and Barna hand us survey after survey demonstrating that evangelical Christians are as likely to embrace lifestyles every bit as hedonistic, materialistic, self-centered, and sexually immoral as the world in general” (*Modern Reformation* [May-June, 1993], cited by Sider, p. 13).

READ: Matthew 7:15-23 (NIV)

“¹⁵ Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves. ¹⁶ By their fruit you will recognize them. Do people pick grapes from thornbushes, or figs from thistles? ¹⁷ Likewise, every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. ¹⁸ A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, and a bad tree cannot bear good fruit. ¹⁹ Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. ²⁰ Thus, by their fruit you will recognize them. ²¹ “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. ²² Many will say to me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name and in your name drive out demons and in your name perform many miracles?’ ²³ Then I will tell them plainly, ‘I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!’” – Matthew 7a:15-23 (NIV)

- 1. According to this passage what is sign that one is a genuine believer, in other words, how may one know they are a genuine believer? What “good fruits” do you think indicate one is a genuine believer?*
- 2. What “good fruits” or good works are mentioned in this passage that don’t necessarily indicate one is truly saved? What does this tell us, do you think, about the place of “good fruit” or good works in securing our salvation? Why?*
- 3. What is most alarming about this passage? How does that make you feel?*

Jesus warned that there will be many who call Him “Lord” who even have done miracles in His name, but at the judgment He will say, “I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness” (Matt. 7:23). In light of these things, we all need to be clear about whether we truly have been born again or not. But can we truly be (clear about it)?

- “I believe in the eternal security of the believer and in the insecurity of the make-believer.” -J. Vernon McGee
- “If a person professes faith in Christ and yet falls away or makes not progress in godliness, it does not mean that he has lost his salvation. It reveals that he was never truly converted.” -Paul Washer
- “I could never either believe or preach a gospel which saves me today and rejects me tomorrow,-a gospel which puts me in Christ’s family one hour, and makes me a child of the devil the next,-a gospel which first justified and then condemns me,-a gospel which pardons me, and afterwards casts me down to hell. Such a gospel is abhorrent to reason itself, much more is it contrary to the mind of the God whom we delight to serve.” – Charles Haddon Spurgeon
- “If one dear saint of God had perished, so might all; if one of the covenant ones be lost, so may all be; and then there is no Gospel promise true, but the Bible is a lie, and there is nothing in it worth my acceptance. I will be an infidel at once when I can believe that

a saint of God can ever fall finally. If God hath loved me once, then He will love me forever.” – Charles Haddon Spurgeon

- “Are you once saved always saved? Absolutely! If you have been truly saved by The Lord Jesus Christ, there is nothing, nor no one, who is able to cause you to lose your salvation!” – Dr. Adrian Rogers
- “The believer need never fear he will lose his salvation. He cannot. The Bible is absolutely clear about that. Jesus said, ‘My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me; and I give eternal life to them, and they shall never perish; and no one shall snatch them out of My hand. My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father’s hand.’ If you are in Christ, rejoice. Your salvation is secure forever.” -Dr. John MacArthur
- “You can’t lose salvation because God is the one who holds you. If it were up to us to keep our salvation, we’d all lose it. But Jesus said, ‘My sheep listen to My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me; and give them eternal life, and they will never perish; and no one will snatch them out of My hand.’ Eternal security is the work of God in which He guarantees that His gift of salvation, once received by faith in Christ, is possessed forever and can never be lost. No one (including us) can condemn us because through Christ’s death and resurrection, God has justified us.” – Dr. Charles Stanley

True followers of Jesus can be overwhelmed by the thought, “Am I really a Christian?” Some who have embraced Christ by faith have no assurance and are plagued by fear. God doesn’t want us to question his power and grace in our lives, though.

The apostle John said in 1 John 5:13, *“¹³ These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life, and that you may continue to believe in the name of the Son of God.”* Despite John’s words, many Christians don’t know if they’re truly saved and are desperate to find out how they can be sure of their salvation.

Scripture gives us three ways to assure ourselves that we truly belong to God. For this reason, I often say that Christian assurance is like a stool with three legs. Each of the legs is a different biblical “proof” that can comfort (or challenge) us. As we’ll see, two of the legs are more subjective (making them less reliable, but nonetheless helpful), and one of them is objective. This objective “leg” of the stool is the most important when it comes to stability in the Christian life. Let’s look at the two subjective legs first, and then we’ll examine the objective leg.

3 Ways to Assure Ourselves that We Are Truly Saved:

- (1) **You can know you’re a Christian because you bear good fruit** - Jesus said in Matthew 7:18-20, *“¹⁸ A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a bad tree bear good fruit. ¹⁹ Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the*

fire. ²⁰ *Therefore by their fruits you will know them.*” Throughout the New Testament, bearing the fruit of the Holy Spirit (Gal. 5:22-23) is one of the signs that we are attached to Jesus by faith (Jn. 15:5). Healthy fruit—good works—aren’t the cause of our salvation, but they are one of the signs we’re truly born again. John said, *“We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brothers. Whoever does not love abides in death”* (1 Jn. 3:14). Did you catch that? Love for the church is one of the ways we can know we’re spiritually alive. There are many people who say, “I love God, but I don’t really care for his people,” or “I have a personal relationship with God; I don’t need an organized church.” According to the apostles, our spiritual life and love for Christ are demonstrated in our love for Christ’s bride, the church! In the midst of doubts, ask yourself, *“Do I love the believers God has placed in my life?”* This love is one of the Spirit-produced fruits of a redeemed individual. Admittedly, this biblical proof is subjective. It could be that when you think about the fruit of the Spirit, love, joy, peace, patience, etc., it’s hard for you to see how these characteristics are present in your life. We have to remember that growth in grace can be a slow process. The church can be helpful here because you may not always be able to see how God is transforming you, but brothers and sisters in Christ who have been in your life for years can!

- (2) **You can know you’re a Christian because the Spirit testifies to you that you are -** Believers in Jesus Christ are filled with the Holy Spirit, and the Holy Spirit reminds us that we belong to God. The apostle Paul wrote in Romans 8:15-16, *“¹⁵ For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, ‘Abba, Father.’ ¹⁶ The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God.”* Not only do our external works of love toward others demonstrate God’s presence in our lives, but there’s an internal work of the Spirit that gives us confidence we’re truly his children. This isn’t an audible voice we hear from heaven, but an inner conviction produced by the Holy Spirit that God is indeed our Father and Jesus is our savior. Jesus said, *“My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand”* (Jn 10:27-28). Ask yourself, “When I approach God, do I approach him as “Abba, Father”? Through Jesus’ death on the cross, we have been given peace with God (Rom. 5:1). We no longer need to fear his judgement and wrath but have been welcomed into his presence. The Spirit proclaims this peace to you in Christ, giving you a supernatural sense of your adoption. Here again we have to recognize that even true believers won’t always have this confidence. Especially after we’ve sinned and grieved the Holy Spirit, we might really question if we are God’s children. Remember that the Bible makes it clear that Christians will always battle with sin (1 Jn 1:8), and therefore we shouldn’t give way to despair. Remember also that the Father—your Father—is good and receives you when, through Christ, you look up to him in faith.
- (3) **You can know you’re a Christian because of God’s Word -** This is the most important but least understood proof of assurance. It’s the most important because, of all the proofs, it’s the most objective. It focuses less on what has been wrought *in you* (like the first two) and more on what has been done *for you*. It’s an external proof rooted in the promises of

God's word which belong to you as a part of the church. When we look to our personal works of holiness, it's easy to get discouraged. "Shouldn't I have grown more in my walk with the Lord by now?" But according to the Scriptures, the anchor of your soul—what keeps you steady—isn't found inside of you *but outside of you*. When you look to God's promise to you in the gospel that through Jesus your sins are forgiven and you are made a part of God's family, you can receive strong encouragement (Heb. 6:18). "Yes," you might be thinking, "But how do I know that promise is *for me*?" Great question! God doesn't just give us his promise through his Word; he stamps it on us personally in Baptism and Communion. These "seals of salvation" are like the seat atop the three legs of assurance. We can look to them and rest, remembering by faith that Jesus really belongs to us, and we belong to him! Baptism and the Lord's Supper serve as tangible tokens of God's grace in your life.

- When you were baptized, it was God objectively showering you with his promise (Rom. 6:1-11).
- When you take the Lord's Supper, it's God saying, "The gospel, Jesus' body and blood, isn't just for people out there, it's for you right here and now!" (Lk. 22:19; 1 Cor. 11:24).
- We as God's people have the sure Word of the gospel to sink our teeth into every time we're plagued with doubts.
- We remember that the washing of baptism and the nourishment of Christ's body and blood belong to us personally.
- Every time you're doubting God's promise of salvation for you, remember that the Triune God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—has placed his name on you.
- By faith you can feed upon his grace and know (even after you've failed for the 100th time) that it's yours.

As the apostle John moves toward the conclusion of this letter, he brings together into one paragraph the three tests of authentic Christianity that he has repeated throughout the book. He does this to summarize and to show that these three tests are part of an interwoven fabric. They all depend on the new birth as their foundation. We may view them as three vital signs of the new birth. If a person has truly received new life from God, these vital signs will be evident. While they grow stronger over time, if there is no evidence of these signs, a person needs to examine whether or not he truly has been born again. John shows that...

The vital signs of the new birth are faith in Jesus Christ, love for others, and obedience to God's commandments.

John's line of thought is not easy to outline here, in that he seems to intertwine ideas. John Stott (*The Epistles of John* [Eerdmans], p. 172) says, "What he [John] is at pains to show is the essential unity of his threefold thesis.... The real link between the three tests is seen to

be the new birth. Faith, love and obedience are the natural growth which follows a birth from above, ...” So we will look first at the new birth and then at the three tests.

THE NEW BIRTH IS THE BASIS OF THE CHRISTIAN LIFE (1 John 5:1, 4)

“¹Whoever 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... ⁴For whatever is born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith.” -1 John 5:1, 4 (NKJV)

John mentions being *“born of God”* in verses 1 & 4. The new birth must be the starting point of any relationship with God...

- You can go to church all your life
- You can be religious and moral
- You can tithe your money to the church

But none of that will get you into heaven. Jesus told Nicodemus in **John 3:3**, who was a very religious and moral man, *“Truly, truly I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God.”* He underscored again in **John 3:7**, *“You must be born again.”*

The Basis of New Life (Salvation) for a Christian:

- (1) **You cannot attain new life by your own efforts** - You can dress up a corpse in the finest of clothes, but it is still a corpse. What it needs is *life*. Spiritually, before we are born again, we are all dead in our trespasses and sins (Eph. 2:1). All of the finest religious clothes in the world will not help that corpse. What we need is new life that only God can impart. We cannot attain to this new life by our own efforts. It is not a matter of trying harder, of cleaning up your life with New Year’s resolutions, of going to church more often, or anything else that you can do.
- (2) **The initiative and power to attain a new life lies with God alone** - The initiative and the power lie with God. Jesus said in **John 5:21**, *“For just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, even so the Son also gives life to whom He wishes.”* That was true of Jesus’ miracles of raising the physically dead back to life. But it is also true spiritually, that the Lord Jesus gives life to whom He wishes. God is the sovereign over our salvation. The apostle Peter exclaims in **1 Peter 1:3**, *“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.”* Or, as Paul puts it in **Ephesians 2:4-5**, *“But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved)....”*
- (3) **Regeneration is the total work of God** - Regeneration (or the new birth) is *totally* a work of God. We cannot play an active role at all, in that we are spiritually dead. Many mistakenly think that being born again is a matter of our “free will” or choice. Certainly,

we must choose to trust in Christ (John 1:12). But the question is, how can a dead sinner do that? John 1:13 states, *“who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.”* Just as none of us had any say in whether we would be born physically, neither did we determine that we would be born spiritually. It is entirely a work of God according to His sovereign will. (For more, see Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology* [Zondervan], pp. 699-706.) In other words, the Bible teaches that the reason you choose to trust Christ is that God has quickened you from the dead. Otherwise, no one could or would choose to trust in Christ. The new birth is essential.

Now with that brief discussion on how we are saved... on the new birth let's look at how we may know that we have been born again. How may we know we are saved? What are vital signs? John, in our passage in 1 John 5:1-5 gives us three vital signs of the new birth.

THREE VITAL SIGNS OF THE NEW BIRTH (1 John 5:1-5)

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

3 Vital Signs of the New Birth:

- (1) **Faith in Jesus as the Christ, the Son of God, is a vital sign of the new birth (1 John 5:1,4,5)** - *“¹Whoever 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.... ⁴For whatever is born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith. ⁵Who is he who overcomes the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?”*
- (2) **Love for God and His children is a vital sign of the new birth (1 John 5:1, 2, 3)** - *“¹Whoever 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. ²By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and keep His commandments. ³For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments. And His commandments are not burdensome.”*
- (3) **Obedience to God's commandments is a vital sign of the new birth (1 John 5:2, 3)** - *“²By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and keep His commandments. ³For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments. And His commandments are not burdensome.”*

FAITH IN JESUS AS THE CHRIST, THE SON OF GOD, IS A VITAL SIGN OF THE NEW BIRTH (1 John 5:1, 4, 5)

¹Whoever 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.... ⁴For whatever is born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith. ⁵Who is he who overcomes the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?” – 1 John 5:1,4,5

John both begins and ends this section with an emphasis on faith in Jesus Christ. Note three things in these verses...

3 Things to Note Concerning Faith's Role in the New Birth:

(1) **Faith is the result of the new birth, not the cause of it** – Notice John's words in verse 1, *¹Whoever 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.* For some reason, even the New American Standard Bible, which is usually quite literal, obscures the sense of the Greek verb in verse 1. The English Standard Version translates correctly, *“Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been born of God....”*

The Greek verb (perfect tense) indicates an action that took place in the past with continuing results in the present and future. In other words, John is emphasizing that faith is the *result* or *evidence* of the new birth, *not* the *cause* of it.

A person who has been born of God in the past will be characterized by ongoing faith in Jesus as the Christ, the Son of God. So one way that you can tell if you've been born again is to answer the question, *“Do you believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God?”*

Many evangelicals object to the teaching that regeneration precedes saving faith. (By *precedes*, I mean logically as the cause, not chronologically. Chronologically, faith occurs immediately after regeneration.) Critics say, “How can God (or preachers) call upon people to believe in Christ as Savior if they cannot believe?” So they make faith the *means* of regeneration, rather than the result. But I would counter, how could Jesus command a dead man, “Lazarus, come forth” (John 11:43)? Isn't it futile to command a dead man to do anything? Yes, unless it is the will of Jesus to raise him from the dead! Then, with the command, God imparts the power of new life, so that Lazarus can obey the command. Lazarus' coming forth is clear evidence that he had already received new life from God. Faith is the evident result of the new birth, not the cause of it.

(2) **Faith has a clearly defined object** – Look at John's words again in verse 1 and then on down in verse 5, *¹Whoever 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....⁵ Who is he who overcomes the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?"

Faith in faith itself or faith in some vague, "I believe for every drop of rain that falls, a flower grows," is not saving faith. Saving faith believes in the person of Jesus.

- Specifically it believes that He is the Christ (5:1), the Son of God (5:5).
- To believe that Jesus is the Christ means that the historic person, Jesus of Nazareth, is God's Anointed One (or Messiah), the one promised and prophesied of in the Old Testament.
- He is the one who would *"save His people from their sins"* (Matthew 1:21).
- To believe that Jesus is the Son of God means that He is the eternal God, the second person of the Trinity, in human flesh.

The Jews of Jesus' day clearly understood that His references to Himself as the Son of God was a claim to deity. When Jesus stated (John 5:17), *"My Father is working until now, and I Myself am working,"* the Jews sought to stone Him because (5:18) He was *"calling God His own Father, making Himself equal with God."* Jesus responded to these charges, not by correcting their understanding as being wrong, but by affirming His equality with God (John 5:19-47).

John (20:31) affirms that the purpose of his gospel was *"so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name."* To believe in Jesus as the Christ, the Son of God, means that you entrust your eternal destiny and your right standing before God not to anything in yourself, including your faith, but entirely to Jesus and His substitutionary death on the cross for your sins. You believe that He paid the debt to God that you owe. Your faith rests completely upon the person and work of Jesus Christ.

- (3) Faith has a clearly observable result... overcoming the world -** Notice again with me verses 4-5, John writes, *"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?"*

Three times John mentions *"overcoming the world."* *"World"* of course refers to the evil, organized system under Satan's dominion that is opposed to God and His purposes. Bishop Westcott (*The Epistles of St. John* [Eerdmans], p. 179) says that the term *"gathers up the sum of all the limited, transitory powers opposed to God which make obedience difficult."*

The Greek noun for *"victory"* (*nike*) is the same root as the verb for *"overcome."* These are terms for warfare or battle. The Christian life is armed combat against the enemy of our souls. John uses two different verb tenses here.

- “Overcomes” (5:4a, 5a) is present tense, indicating ongoing, repeated victories over worldly powers and influences.
- But “has overcome” (5:4b) is the Greek aorist tense, which may be taken several ways.
- It may look at the overall result as a whole, showing that the normal Christian life is one of overcoming the enemy (constative or gnomic aorist).
- Or, it could point to the position of victory that we inherit in Christ.
- Or, it could indicate John’s readers’ decisive rejection of the false teachers and their damnable doctrines.
- The emphasis is not on our faith, but on the object of our faith, Jesus Christ.

John Calvin (*Calvin’s Commentaries* [Baker], p. 255) puts it, “faith receives from another that by which it overcomes.” He says that if we put the emphasis on our faith, we “take away from God what is his own.” He adds (p. 256), “For by *faith* he means a real apprehension of Christ, or an effectual laying hold on him, by which we apply his power to ourselves.”

John’s point is that the faith that God imparts to us in the new birth results in a life of consistent victory over the evil forces of this world. While none of us will be completely untainted by worldly influences or values in this life, John’s point here is the same one he made in 1John 2:15, “*If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him.*” Those who are born of God should consistently and progressively overcome the world.

Thus the new birth is the basis of the Christian life. Faith in Jesus as the Christ, the Son of God, is a vital sign of the new birth.

LOVE FOR GOD AND HIS CHILDREN IS A VITAL SIGN OF THE NEW BIRTH (1 John 5:1, 2, 3)

¹Whoever 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. ²By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and keep His commandments. ³For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments. And His commandments are not burdensome.” – 1 John 5:1,2,3

I am not going to spend much time here, since we just studied it (1 John 4:7-21). John’s point here is the same as there, that love for God and love for His children are inextricably bound together. If you love the Father, you will love the child born of Him (1 John 5:1). You can’t divorce the first and the second great commandments.

Also, love for God and His children is primarily volitional, not emotional. Love for God is expressed by keeping His commandments (1 John 5:3). Loving God’s children is seen when

we love God and keep His commandments (1 John 5:2). While you should have feelings of love for God and for His children, feelings are not the basis of such love. As we've seen, biblical love is primarily a self-sacrificing commitment to seek the other person's highest good.

At first, it sounds as if John is reasoning in a circle here. In 1 John 4:20, he said that you can't love God if you don't love your brother. But in 1 John 5:2, he states that you can know that you love your brother when you love God. How do we sort this out?

Notice our passage again in verses 1-3...

"¹Whoever 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. ²By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and keep His commandments. ³For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments. And His commandments are not burdensome." – 1 John 5:1,2,3

3 Things John is Showing Us About Love for God and Others:

- (1) **John show us that you cannot divorce love for God from love for your brother, and vice versa** - One clear application of verse 1 is that we must love all that have truly been born of God. If there is evidence that a person is a child of God through the new birth, then he is my brother (or sister), even if I disagree with him about certain doctrinal matters. I must accept him, just as Christ accepted me (Rom. 15:7). While we may need to draw more narrow lines when it comes to laboring together in the gospel, we should not draw those lines when it comes to love.
- (2) **John may be saying that our motive for loving the children of God should be genuine love for God in obedience to His commandments** - Notice **verse 2**... John says, "²By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and keep His commandments." In other words, the reason we love others should not be natural factors, whether in them or in us. Rather, we are doing it to please God in obedience to His Word.
- (3) **John may mean that genuine love for others must be defined by obedience to God's commandments, not by cultural definitions of love** - Again **verse 2** says, "²By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and keep His commandments." Our culture (the world) would say that if a brother falls into serious sin, the loving thing to do is to be nice and overlook his sin. To call it sin or try to correct the sinner would be judgmental and unloving. But to show genuine love to a sinning brother, we must love God and obey His commandments. This means going to the sinner in love to try to get him to repent. It means showing him that Jesus Christ is ready to forgive and give victory over this sin. Anything less than this is not biblical love, either for God or for the sinning believer.

Thus the vital signs of the new birth are faith in Jesus Christ and love for others. Finally,

OBEDIENCE TO GOD'S COMMANDMENTS IS A VITAL SIGN OF THE NEW BIRTH (1 John 5:2, 3)

***"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."** – 1 John 5:2-3*

John uses the word **"commandments"** three times. As we've seen, John is not saying that believers obey God perfectly. Rather, he is looking at the overall direction of our lives.

A Christian's life should be marked by obedience out of a heart of love for God. When a child of God sins, he confesses his sin so that he can be restored to fellowship with God (1 John 1:9; 1 John 2:1). The person who claims to be born again, but who is not concerned about a lifestyle of disobedience to God's Word, should examine himself to see if he really is in the faith (1 John 3:4-10; 2 Cor. 13:5).

John adds an uplifting word at the end of **verse 3, "And His commandments are not burdensome."** He does not mean that obedience to God's commandments is always easy or effortless. The warfare terminology of **"overcoming"** and **"victory"** shows that obedience is often a battle. The world, the flesh, and the devil are formidable foes that we must constantly fight against. So in what sense are God's commandments not burdensome?

What John Means by God's Commandments not being Burdensome:

- (1) **God's commandments are not burdensome because we have a new nature that has the power to obey** - That is the implication of **"for"** at the beginning of **verse 4...** ***"⁴ For whatever is born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith."*** (Some versions put a comma or semicolon at the end of 1 John 5:3, rather than a period.) God's commandments are not burdensome because **"whatever is born of God overcomes the world."** **"Whatever"** is a neuter in Greek, which probably focuses on our new nature that overcomes the world. Thus John emphasizes not **"the victorious person,"** but **"the victorious power."** "It is not the man, but his birth from God, which conquers" (Alfred Plummer, cited by Stott, p. 174).
- (2) **God's commandments are not burdensome because they are the commands of God, not of man** - The commandments of men are burdensome. Invariably they stem from an attempt to earn standing with God or status before men through a system of human works. The Pharisees had added their commandments to God's commands, but Jesus called them **"heavy burdens"** (Matt. 23:4). Even God's law, apart from the grace of Christ, was a heavy yoke that no one could bear (Acts 15:10; Gal. 5:1). But, God's commandments come from an all-wise heavenly Father, designed for our good. Our gentle Savior said, **"My yoke is easy and My load is light"** (Matt. 11:30).
- (3) **God's commandments are not burdensome because they are given and received in the context of love** - A loving father does not tell his child to stay away from a busy

street because he wants to take away his fun, but because he loves him and wants to protect him from injury or death. An immature child may think that his father's commandment is restrictive, but he needs to trust his father's love and obey anyway. An immature believer may view God's commands as restrictive. But our heavenly Father knows that sin will damage and destroy us. If we have come to know His love in Christ through the new birth, then we must trust His love and obey His commandments. When we see that God's commands stem from His love for us as His children, they are not burdensome.

CONCLUSION

The Apostle Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 13:5-6, "*Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith; test yourselves. Do you not realize that Christ Jesus is in you — unless, of course, you fail the test?*" This was not his call for us to "doubt" our salvation or "question" our faith, but a call to check the health life signs in our Christian life and walk... take a look at the vital signs in our life.

When you look in the mirror, what do you see? Obviously, you see your reflection. Every day, we look into the mirror to examine ourselves, look for faults we need to fix, and ensure we look presentable. However, *do you know that we also need to look into the spiritual mirror to help us examine ourselves?*

Self-examination is a crucial part of our spiritual growth. When we look at our spiritual mirror, what do you see? Do you see mostly your carnal and worldly attitude? Or do you see the character of God the Father and Jesus Christ reflected back to you?

The question now is, how should we examine ourselves? Here are three ways we can examine ourselves effectively...

3 Effective Ways We can Examine Ourselves:

(1) **Examine your faith** - "EXAMINE yourselves as to whether you are in the faith. *Test yourselves. Do you not know yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you?—unless indeed you are disqualified.*" The word *examine* comes from the Greek word, *peirazo*, which means to "scrutinize and try." We need to examine ourselves whether we are in the faith or not. There is always a chance for us to get deceived. That's why we are told to be like the Bereans who received the word of God with ALL READINESS. However, they did not stop there. They also *searched* the scriptures daily (Acts 17:11). Whether we are new or old in the church, we must not just receive doctrines without really looking into the Bible ourselves. It doesn't mean that if the church leaders say this and that, we just blindly believe. We also do our own investigation because, in the process, we all learn and grow. We are able to prove all things (I Thessalonians 5:21). By doing so, we can develop more confidence and faith in what we believe. In addition to that, Paul said to *test yourselves*. Now, the Greek word used in the word test is *dokimazo*, which is a

stronger term compared to the Greek word *peirazo*. It means to *test as to metals*. For blacksmiths, they need to test a metal through intense heat and reveal its true identity. A blacksmith who wants to know the real quality of a metal does not just sit down and examine it visually. But he actually *dokimazo* the metal. He would use fire to test it.

- (2) **Examine your works** - We read in Galatians 6:3-5, “For if anyone thinks himself to be something, when he is nothing, he deceives himself. *But let each one examine his own work, and then he will have rejoicing in himself alone, and not in another. For each one shall bear his own load.*” From this scripture, we can see that we must examine our works. Again, we can see the danger of deception from this verse. It says that if you think of yourself more highly than what you really are, then you are just deceiving yourself. So, what’s the solution? What should we do to avoid being deceived in this way? It says, let everyone examine his own work. We need to ensure that our work, deeds, and actions are in *agreement* with our faith. It is not enough to learn God’s way. We must apply what we learn and employ them in our lives. *It is not what we know that will save us. It is what we do with what we know.* Even if you have a photographic memory, memorize everything in the Bible, and quote bible verses at will, all of them will boil to *nothing* if you don’t apply them in your life. Examine your works. Whether you are applying what you learn or not. We know that it is the Sabbath, and still, we are breaking it. We know that murder is bad, and still, we hate our brothers. We know that idolatry is bad, and still, we put something between God and us. We are aware that adultery is bad, and still, we watch porn and the list just goes on and on. Now after examining our works, we will have rejoicing in ourselves and not in others. This means that we don’t do good works *because we want to impress others or gain their approval.* We don’t need their applause and recognition. We simply do good works out of love for God and for other people. To effectively examine ourselves, we need to read the Bible and see what God expects from us.
- (3) **Examine yourself through the perspective of God** - The Psalmist writes in Psalm 139:23-24 (NLT) “*Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. Point out anything in me that offends you, and lead me along the path of everlasting life.*” We need to remember that we CAN’T properly examine ourselves without the help of God. We need to pray for God to show us our hidden sins and be ready to accept those faults, repent of them, and change our wicked ways. When examining ourselves, **let us not use other people as our standard.** We can’t look at others and say, “I’m better than this person and that person. I guess I’m okay.” No, that’s not how you examine yourself. The Bible is like a mirror. You don’t look in the mirror just to examine what it looks like and how beautiful the mirror is. You look in the mirror to examine your appearance and correct anything that needs to be changed. In the same way, *we don’t just look at our Bible and praise how beautiful its content is.* We need to read the Bible, identify our faults, and do our best to change them.

Application Questions

1. If faith is the result, not the cause, of the new birth, why does the Bible call upon all people to believe in Christ? Is this contradictory, as some allege?
2. Why is it important to affirm that the new birth is totally from God? What practical spiritual implications does this have?
3. Why must we define love for others in terms of love for God and obedience to His commandments (5:2)?
4. What should a believer do when he feels that God's commandments are burdensome? What steps should he take?