

Birth – Faith – Love - Truth

One of my hopes today is to show that our ability to love others imperfectly is based on our assurance that in Christ we already love them perfectly. In other words, I want you to see for yourselves that, even when you fail to love, as we ought, Christ's perfection stands before God in place of that failure. I want you to see that faith in Christ is the way you enjoy union with Christ. Therefore, faith must come first and be the foundation of love. Only because of Christ are we able to love. Otherwise, we love as the world loves and that is fleeting at best. If you don't love in this way, your failures will probably overwhelm you with guilt and hopelessness. If that happens, you will give way either to hardworking legalism or fatalistic immorality of the world.

We have heard all our lives that a chain is only as strong as its weakest link. The chain I want to build link-by-link today is spiritual birth links to faith in Christ and faith links to love and love links to eternal truth.

Link – Birth and Faith

I begin by reading 1 John 5:3 and 4, “[For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments. And his commandments are not burdensome.](#) ⁴ [For everyone who has been born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith.](#)” The reason we are starting here is to see how it is the new spiritual birth that gives us belief in Christ and this is what enables us to love people. How being born again, our faith and love are links of a chain and they

relate to each other. What is important and makes all the difference is whether you see this relationship for yourselves in the Word of God. This is the goal before us this morning.

Link – Faith and Love

The second link is found in verse 3, “For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments. And his commandments are not burdensome.” People sometimes equate keeping commandments with loving God. Often they quote Jesus’ words found in John’s gospel account, “If you love me, you will keep my commandments.” (John 14:15) But this text clearly distinguishes loving Christ from obeying his commandments. If you love me—that’s one thing—then you will keep my commandments—that’s another thing. The one leads to the other; love leads to obeying. If you have the one, you will do the other. But, love and “commandment keeping” are not identical.

It is not wrong to say that loving Jesus or loving God includes doing what He commands. But that’s not all it is. Which is why John says in verse 3, “And his commandments are not burdensome.” Loving God is not just external obedience, but having a heart that doesn’t find the commandments burdensome.

If the commandments are not burdensome, what are they? They are desirable. What you desire to do with your whole heart is not burdensome to do. Listen to the psalms, to the heart of the writers. King David wrote, “I delight to do your will, O my God; your law is within my heart.” (Psalm 40:8) From the longest chapter in the Bible the psalmist writes, “Your testimonies are my delight; they are my counselors” and a few verses later, “Lead me in the path of your

commandments, for I delight in it” and about half way through this longest Psalm we read, “If your law had not been my delight, I would have perished in my affliction.” (Psalm 119:24, 35 & 92) Loving God means admiring and valuing and treasuring and desiring Him with such genuineness that His will is your delight and is not burdensome.

Before we go to the next link in the chain found in verses 3 and 4, let’s be sure that we know what commandments of God the Apostle John especially has in mind when he speaks about keeping the commandments of God as an expression of loving Him. It is pretty obvious if we follow John’s train of thought beginning from 4:20 forward. John says, “If anyone says, ‘I love God,’ and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen.” Verse 21 continues with the command, “And this commandment we have from him: whoever loves God must also love his brother.”

Since John is the last apostle, the last writer, he is saying it different than Mark and Luke who recorded Jesus’ words, and yet, they are all saying the same thing, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.”³¹ The second is this: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no other commandment greater than these.” (Mark 12:30-31 and Luke 10:27) So it appears that the specific obedience that John has in mind which would show we love God is we love others, especially other believers.

We have been exploring verses 3 and 4. Now lets go back to verse 1, “Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been born of God, and everyone who loves the Father loves whoever has been born of him.” Here it is again; the sign that you

love God is your love of Christ and if you love Christ you love others, especially other believers. Then verse 2 turns it around and says that loving God is the sign that you love his children, “By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and obey his commandments.” I think the point of this is to guard against emotional reinterpretations of what love is. Interpretations and definitions that leave God and His commandments out of what love is are flawed. If you do that, then you are left with pseudo love or worldly love. John is saying, do not redefine love, for if you do you no longer have a true definition of love. You do not love anybody if you do not love God. You may think you do, but without God, you have the world’s definition of love and all we have to do is look at history or look around us and see how this does not work. John says, “By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and obey his commandments.”

If you don’t love God, you can’t do anybody any ultimate good. You can feed people and clothe them and house them and keep them comfortable while they perish. But in God’s mind that is not what love is. Love does feed and clothe and house—and keeps the commandments and this would include helping others know God by your love of God in Christ. But, if you don’t love God, you can’t do that. **So if you don’t love God, you can’t love people in the way that lasts for eternity.** You love them in a short-term way. You may help them or feed them as you watch them perish eternally.

When John says, “This is the love of God, that we keep his commandments. And his commandments are not burdensome.” (Verse 3) What John is saying is the commandments are summed up, first by loving God and then to love other

people, especially believers. This is close to the words of Christ found in Mark and Luke. So we could paraphrase verse 3 like this, “This is the love of God, that we love others, especially His children and that this life of sacrificial Christ-like love is not burdensome. It’s what we most deeply desire to do as an expression of our love for the Father.” Or as Jesus said, **“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.”**³¹ **The second is this: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no other commandment greater than these.”** (Mark 12:30-31)

Link – Birth, Faith and Love

The third link in our chain, which actually comes before the first two, is also found in verse 3, **“For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments. And his commandments are not burdensome.”** Notice the word *“For”* at the beginning. John says I am now going to explain why loving God by keeping His commandments, which John says is to love other people, is not burdensome. We find the answer to why God’s commandments are not burdensome as verse 4 continues, **“For everyone who has been born of God overcomes the world.”** Notice again the word *“For”* tying verse 4 to verse 3. The answer is because **“everyone who has been born of God overcomes the world.”**

We are able to love God and love others because of the new birth given by God and by this new birth we have conquered the world. John says clearly, **“Everyone who has been born of God overcomes the world.”** This must mean that there are forces in the world that work to make us not love God and not love each other. But, in the new birth these forces have been overcome. Our new birth makes us children of the Father, through Christ the Son and our power comes from God’s

gift of Himself as the Holy Spirit living within us.

Forces in the World

What would these worldly forces be? Let's go back a few pages in your Bibles to 1st John 2:15-17 for the clearest answer in this letter. Follow me as I read, "Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. ¹⁶ For all that is in the world—the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride of life—is not from the Father but is from the world. ¹⁷ And the world is passing away along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever."

So here are the forces in the world that have to be overcome beginning in verse 16, "the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride of life," We advertise and sell everything in America by using the desires of the flesh and eyes. Pride of life for most Americans is their position in career and society, and materialism or their possessions. That could be summed up as desires for what we do not have and pride in what we do have. When we don't have what we want, the world corrupts us with covetousness. Who can tell me which of the Ten Commandments found in Exodus 20 covetousness is? Right, number 10, "You shall not covet ... anything that is your neighbor's." (Exodus 20:17) When we do have "stuff" we want everyone to know what we have and the world corrupts us with pride. Because of our pride we worship ourselves and our possessions instead of worshipping God. What commandment does this violate? Correct, number 3, "You shall have no other gods before me. ⁴ You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth" (Exodus 20:3-4) For

many people their idolatry is found is self-worship and their possessions.

This is what keeps us from loving God and loving each other. We love stuff. When we don't have it, we crave it and when we do have it, we love to talk about it. Where is God in all this? At best, He's there as the God of cargo or stuff. When Joyce and I lived in Papua New Guinea many would claim Christ in order to get stuff from the missionaries and often the missionaries were too eager to supply them with stuff or cargo. These professing, but unbelieving Christians, were commonly referred as "Cargo Christians." We may even thank God for all our stuff for He does provide our needs. However, if in our hearts our gratitude is in the having of stuff instead of the One who provides, well then, the stuff is our god.

Force Within - New Birth

The main reason we don't love God and we find it burdensome to love people is that our desire is for the things of the world. They may be good things. Unfortunately, they may also be bad things. Often they are material things. Whatever their form, they are not of God. When we desire them above God, they are idols. They replace love for God and love for people. That is the universal problem of the world. What's the solution?

John's answer is in 1 John 5:3-4 as we just saw that new birth given by God is the reason loving God and loving people is not burdensome. By our new birth given by God we possess the power of God within us, and it is this power that overcomes the world. Now we can see what John has been saying. John means that the new birth severs the link of those desires for the world. Our new birth breaks the chains of the evil one and this world. **Overcoming the world means**

that the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and the pride in possessions don't rule us anymore. Their power over us is broken.

Link – Faith and Truth

How does that work? This is what the last half of verse 4 tells us and is our fourth link. Reading the second half of verse 4, “And this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith.” The reason the new birth conquers the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and the pride in possessions is that it creates faith.

The most immediate and decisive work of God in the new birth that gives us faith in the only thing that has power to overcome this world and the influences of the evil one and that power is faith in Jesus Christ. Our new birth is immediate, no lapse of time at all. Then the Spirit that lives within us begins changing us alongside the Word of God over our lifetime. Jesus becomes more and more the treasure of our life instead of the stuff of this world. God is the giver of faith and Jesus is foundation of our faith and the Spirit enables us to live by faith. As our faith grows we see the purpose of life through the eyes of the Holy Spirit and God's Word. We see what the world cannot - the truth of God.

That is why faith conquers the world. The world held us in bondage by the power of its desires, by the temptations of this world, which come from the prince of the air. But now our eyes have been opened by the new birth to see the truth of Jesus. Jesus is better than the desires of the flesh, and better than the desires of the eyes, and better than the riches that strangle us with greed and pride. Jesus said, “The cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches and the desires for other things enter in and choke the word, and it proves unfruitful.” (Mark 4:19).

The solution is to quit feeding upon the world and feed upon God through prayer and the study and mediating upon His Word, eternal truth. Do not let the world choke the Word of God from your life. Instead fill yourself with the thoughts of God, the truth that endures forever.

Now we are in a position to answer our original question about the relationship between God's regenerating new birth giving us faith in Christ and this enabling us to love people. Here's what we can say and why it is so important.

We can say, first, that regeneration is the cause of faith. This is plain in the words of John, "[Everyone who believes](#) (*Meaning those who have faith because God has given them new birth.*) [Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been born of God, and everyone who loves the Father loves whoever has been born of him.](#)" (1 John 5:1) Having been born of God results in our believing. Our believing is the immediate evidence of God's gift of our new birth. We can say that loving people is the fruit of this faith. This is why John says in verse 4, "[This is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith.](#)"

So, in the order of relationship we experience begins with the first link of our new birth. The second link in the chain is our faith in Jesus. The third link is living God's commandments without a sense of burdensomeness and is expressed by loving others. The fourth link is we see the truth of who God is while the world stays blind. God is the source of our new new birth. The new birth is the creation of new life that sees Christ for who He is and receives Him into our hearts and we experience faith. [Faith severs the chains of the desires of the world and sets us free to love.](#)

This order is important because it will keep you from confusing saving faith and love for people. There are some who are combining faith in Christ and love for people. They are saying that faith really means faithfulness, and that faithfulness includes love for people and so there is no way to distinguish faith in Christ and love for people.

I think that is a serious mistake. Let me explain why. Faith in Christ and love for people *are* inseparable. But they are not indistinguishable. They are so inseparable that John can sum up all God's demands in these two elements - faith and love. Turn to 1st John 3:23 where John makes this clear. "This is his commandment, that we believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ and love one another, just as he has commanded us." The summary of all the tests of life written here in John's letter; believe in Jesus and love each other.

But the order of cause and effect is crucial. The reason it is crucial is this, there is going to come a day when you do not love, as you ought. What will you do if your heart condemns you because you know that love is a sign of the new birth? How will you fight the fight of faith in Christ with assurance at that time?

Here is one crucial way to fight for your hope at that moment and it depends on a clear distinction between faith in Christ and love for people. Turn to chapter 2 of 1st John, "My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin (Which John has defined as failing to love others as we ought to, but we can easily include all sin.), we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous." John assumes that when, not if, for we will fail at times, but when you sin, when you do not love as you ought, you have an Advocate before God. This Advocate is called "the righteous." That is, He is

perfect. Paul clarified this when he wrote to the believers in Rome. “Who shall bring any charge against God’s elect? It is God who justifies. ³⁴ Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us.” (Romans 8:33-34) Even though you have sinned, Jesus has never sinned. When you have failed to love, as you ought, He has never failed to love, as He ought. Jesus stands before God and advocates for you, not against you, but He is for you. Jesus does this because you have failed, but you are His – His beloved. Remember we just read what John said, “But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.” (1 John 2:1)

The emphasis is not on us, but on Jesus’ righteousness and His sinlessness. It is Jesus perfectly doing what we have failed to do. The reason this works for us is that faith, given by the Father enables us to have faith to receive Jesus into our souls. When faith receives Jesus, He is everything that we need before God. He is our righteousness and our perfection and our perfect love. This is the bottom line of our hope before a holy God.

This is why it is so crucial to see that believing in Jesus is different from loving people. Loving Jesus is the foundation of true love. Believing Jesus means receiving Him into us. Loving others means going out to them by the power and love of Jesus. We are able to go out to them imperfectly because we have received Jesus as our perfection. Receiving Jesus means that He is our foundation and the bedrock of our salvation. He is the cornerstone of our hope. It is Jesus’ righteousness and His perfection and His love that ultimately counts before the Father. The key is faith in Jesus, not love for people. Receiving Jesus as our

substitute righteousness and perfection and love is key. This faith in Jesus is first and then comes love for others.

That is why I can have hope even when I stumble. My standing with God does not go up and down or in and out; God is ever there, whether I am walking a true path or stumbling. My standing with God is the righteousness of my Advocate. My perfect Advocate is God's truth, "We shall know that we are of the truth and reassure our heart before him; ²⁰ for whenever our heart condemns us, God is greater than our heart, and he knows everything." (1 John 3:19-20) My heart, mind and soul belong to Jesus and His perfection protects me and by Him I belong to the Father forever.

God sees me in Christ. I do not despair because of my failures. I am not paralyzed with hopelessness. Jesus provides my solution and your solution, "If we confess our sins, he (God) is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." (1 John 1:9) We can embrace our forgiveness that Jesus has secured for us by His death and resurrection! Jesus has removed God's wrath from us, "He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world." (2:2) Further, "We shall know that we are of the truth and reassure our heart before him" because God sees us through our Advocate, Jesus! (3:19)

So I end where I started. I wanted you to see for yourselves that our ability to love others imperfectly is based on the fact that in Christ we already love them perfectly. He is the perfection that we need before God. We have it not by loving others, but by trusting Him. This very assurance is the key to loving others. If we lose this key, we lose everything including the power to love others. Let me finish

with the inspired words of John from chapter 5 beginning with verse 1, “Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been born of God, and everyone who loves the Father loves whoever has been born of him. ² By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and obey his commandments. ³ For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments. And his commandments are not burdensome. ⁴ For everyone who has been born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith. ⁵ Who is it that overcomes the world except the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?”

Amen and amen!