

## 1 JOHN 5:1-5

### INTRODUCTION

As we move into chapter 5 John is now beginning to draw his book to a close. In this passage he is re-emphasising three of the main tests that John has used in this book as a test towards the genuineness of our faith. He has talked about belief, he has talked about obedience and love and now John puts all three together to show that you cannot separate one from the other. However there is a very clear order to these tests and John mentions belief first of all because without a true belief you cannot love and obey God and you cannot love others either.

This is why John mentions belief in the opening verse of chapter 5.

### 1. THE NEW BIRTH COMES FIRST (v 1)

John made it clear all through this epistle (3:9 and 4:7) that believing the truth about Jesus is the first and most important thing. Everything else obedience and love will follow but you cannot obey and love in any true biblical sense of those words without a clear belief in Jesus. Once again John raises this important order and clearly by the order tells us that when it comes to true Christianity then a new birth must come first. The use of the Greek 'perfect tense' needs to be brought out more clearly here. The phrase 'everyone believes' is in the present tense, this means that everyone who is believing now. But the words that 'Jesus is the Christ is born of God' are actually in the perfect tense. Now the perfect tense is used in Greek when something, which occurred in the past, has an abiding influence into the future. This means that something that happen in the past enables us to believe in Jesus now.

Now it is typical of John not to go further than to make clear statements so we must fill this out so that we understand further what John is saying.

Being born of God which is something which happened in the past and is the result of the work of the Holy Spirit in one's heart leads us to faith in Jesus as the Christ. Being born of God leads to us having saving faith in God and leads to us everyday trusting Jesus and believing the right doctrine about Jesus.

Now from a doctrinal view what John is emphasising here is that we come to faith in Jesus because of the new birth. This is important for most Christians teach that when we come to Christ by faith we are born again by the Spirit of God. But this has got it the wrong way round. The bible teaches that the Holy Spirit comes to sinners who are spiritually dead (Ephesus 2:1-6); they are wilfully ignorant of the things of God (Ephesians 4:18) they are slaves to sin (John 8:34) and are alienated from God (Colossians 1:21). It's the work of the Spirit that makes sinners spiritually alive, enlightens them, frees them and reconciles them in Christ Jesus. This doctrine is called regeneration and it is not something we can achieve for ourselves or even decide to let God achieve for us it is something that God alone can do and he does so out of pure grace towards sinners.

The consequence of this new life, which is implanted in the sinner, is that we are enabled to believe and to keep on believing that Jesus is the Christ.

So John's point is that if we are believing that Jesus is the Christ, the Messiah the promised one the Saviour of his people and if we are believing that now then that is clear evidence that we are born of God. What this means is that anyone who is not believing now that Jesus is the Christ then such people are not born again. John is obviously thinking of the false teachers again. They once belonged to the church; they probably believed orthodox Christian beliefs but then they began to believe in a special anointing of the Spirit, which led to a special knowledge of God.

In turn they began to abandon their belief in Jesus as the incarnate Son of God, as the Messiah and Saviour. What John is saying is that such people are not born of God they are not Christians no matter what they may be claiming

This is true today isn't it? Many of the cults were started by people who belonged to the Christian church and who accepted Christian truth. Many of them would have called themselves Christians. But over a period of time they began to doubt gospel truths and began to substitute truth with error and eventually broke away from the church and started their sect. Such people prove they are not born again. But so do those who were once members of an evangelical church but for some reason have fallen away.

Such people from my own experience seem to want to call themselves Christians but what John is saying is that they have no right to do so for the evidence that one is born again and therefore is a Christian is belief in Jesus now. Such people are persevering in the faith that is why it is those who persevere to the end that are saved. But John's point is to encourage the church; his purpose is to assure the church and therefore anyone who is trusting in Jesus now as Christ, as Saviour can be assured that they are born of God.

## 2. THE EFFECTS OF THE NEW BIRTH (vs. 2-5)

The effects of this new birth are fourfold. I have already mentioned the first one, which is belief in Jesus as the Christ. But now John mentions two more in verses 2-3 and a final one in verses 4-5. As we will see they are all interrelated. When we are born again then not only do we believe in Jesus but we also love God and love those that God loves (v 1). But notice that John says that we demonstrate our love for God's people when we love God and obey his commands (v 2).

This sounds a little strange to us that a test for knowing whether we love our fellow Christians is to ask do we love God and obey his commands? Now these three truths always go together, faith in Jesus, love for fellow believers and love and obedience to God.

These three truths cannot be separated from one another for anyone who is born again will believe and will love others and will love and obey God. What this means is that all these strands are of vital importance for proving that we are born again. You here people say what is important is love; doctrine is irrelevant as long as we

love one another that is all that matters. If our world loved a little more then it would be a better place. But to speak like this is to separate what John unites.

In the same way someone else might say we need to get back to the old paths and teach our children to obey God's laws. Surely if we taught people to obey the Ten Commandments then that would make our world a better place. At the same time someone might say that we need to get back to reformed doctrine within our churches and that would show people that we are born again. But those responses are equally wrong as the person who believes that love is all that matters. We cannot separate what John has put together, reformed doctrine must go hand in hand with love for God and our fellow Christians and with clear obedience to God.

Otherwise what will happen is that we have a sound church theologically with no or little love and with a wilful disobedience to the clear commands of God. No! being born again will mean that we believe in Jesus and believe right doctrine about Jesus.

It will also mean that we will love and seek to obey God and it will also mean that we will love our fellow believers. Now the link between all these is obvious when we think about it. God has brought life into our dead souls and the result is that we are now able to believe the truth about Jesus and we trust him as our Saviour. We are full of gratitude to God for his grace to us and we naturally love him as a result. He has become our Father and we now have ties and bonds to God through Jesus.

We are now adopted into his family and therefore we have ties and bonds with all his family. We want to express those ties in family love to our brothers and sisters. Both our love for God and our love for his children cannot exist without the other (1:7). Now it is important to remember that John is not giving us duties that we ought to fulfil but he is simply describing real Christianity without which no one can claim to be born again.

So often our feelings are unreliable and we can often doubt our salvation because we do not feel that we love God or feel that we love our fellow Christians. But John gives us a very important corrective here (v 2). We do love God and others if we carry out his commands. No matter what our feelings might say the question is do we obey God's commands if so then that means we do love God and his people?

Let me give you an example here. The ninth commandment tells us that we are not to give false witness. (Exodus 20:16). Now we show our love for God by recognising that this command reflects God's truthful and loving character and by keeping it. In so doing we also love our neighbour by protecting him from lies which can destroy character and reputation. Now we may not have any great feelings of love for our neighbour or for God but by our obedience we are demonstrating our love.

That's how it is in the church; we show our love and commitment to God and his people by obeying God's commands. Anyone can tell me that they love me in Christ but actually It's only their obedience to God that demonstrates their love to me. So for example someone tells me they love Jesus but fail to come to church. What they actually tell me is that they do not love Jesus for they fail to obey him.

Someone might say to me that they love fellow Christians but actually their failure to pray for them is actually telling me that they do not love their fellow Christian and they do not love God. I have over emphasised this point enough but I hope you can now see this point clearly. The effect of being born again is right belief in Jesus, love and obedience to God and love for fellow Christians. Separate any of these and you are showing that you are not born again.

Now John adds something else (v 3). 'This is love for God to obey his commands' but as soon as you mention the word 'commands' we can become very negative. To the unbeliever commands speak of restriction for them, freedom is found in doing what one likes and the commandments of God are seen as burdensome, an irritation and irksome. But that of course is not the reality. One commentator says, "His commands are no more burdensome than wings to a bird." God's commands are the means to freedom and fulfilment they are instructions to help live as God intended us to live. Jesus said that 'my yoke is easy and my burden is light' (Matthew 11:30). Jesus was contrasting his commands with the heavy load of legalism with which the Pharisees had burdened people's consciences. All those commands could do was cripple and paralyse those who submitted to the traditions of religious leaders.

But Christ's commands are for our ultimate good, he will give us strength to do what he has commanded and our sense of love for God will make our burden light. It is sin's way that is burdensome. We need to ask ourselves have our burdens in our own lives come as a result of our obedience or disobedience to God. Again let me give you examples. Where is the burden in a home when husbands and wives love each other with consideration and faithfulness?

Where is the burden at work when people are truthful, diligent and caring?

Where is the burden in society when everyone considers others better than themselves? The truth is that it's our sins that are burdensome, it is our selfishness, dishonestly, pride, lust and so on that weigh us down but serving Christ in love frees us from such burdens. I have had Christian people tell me that the demands of the church are just too much. But as long as the demands of the church are in line with Christ's commands then there is no way that they are excessive.

The excessiveness comes when we fail to obey Christ's commands when we are living in disobedience. So if you think they are excessive then ask yourself are you obeying Christ's commands or is there some thing in your life which is in disobedience to the word of God that is making Christ's demands seem irksome and burdensome. The fact that his commands are not burdensome should be an encouragement to obey our God.

Life is easier when we obey God it becomes more stressful and complicated when we disobey God and try to do what we want rather than what God says is best for us. Of course this does not mean that life will be a piece of cake if we obey, for obedience to Christ leads to opposition from this world. But although obedience to God's commandments will lead us to some grief from the world ultimately there is joy and peace and delight in obeying God.

However although disobedience to God might bring some passing pleasures into our lives ultimately it will only bring us misery, stress and dissatisfaction in life.

Now I did say that the effects of the new birth were fourfold. So far we have majored on three of those effects but the fourth one is found in verses 4-5. The new birth ushers in victory for the Christian. What is it that can harm the Christian? Sin can yes but Christ has paid the penalty for sin so ultimately it cannot harm us. Sickness can but Christ has overcome sin and therefore the effects of sin are limited to this world. It cannot ultimately destroy us.

Death affects us but Christ has overcome death. Satan can attack us but he too has been defeated by the work of Christ on the cross. Hell has no power over us because Christ has died so that hell no longer is our destiny. It is our faith in Christ that enables us to overcome the world. He is the victor he has overcome all these things and therefore all who believe and have faith in him shares his victory.

Faith gives us the victory because it unites us to Christ, we are in him and he has won the victory over the world. But this victory is only for those who believe that Jesus is the Son of God (v 5). He has won the victory but we enjoy that victory only when we believe in Christ. Believing in Christ is only possible when we have received the new birth.

So are you born again? Has God come upon your soul and awakened you from your spiritual deadness. If so then you will be trusting Christ every day and the result of that is victory over all our enemies. This victory is a reality and although we will not experience ultimate victory until heaven that victory has already been won for us in Christ Jesus. Everyday we have to step out in faith trusting in Christ alone, every day we need his help as we battle against sin the world and the devil.

But as we do so and as we use the means of grace available to us then we will be victorious through Christ. But when we do have set backs and fall into sin and know defeats as Christians we must remember that although we might lose some battles we will win the war. The result has already been decided by Christ through his death for sinners.

Therefore as I conclude let me remind you that the effects of the new birth in Christ is not spectacular gifts or secret knowledge as the false teachers were proclaiming. But its right belief in Jesus, love for God and his people, and obedience to his commands. All this will not be a burden to us but a joy and as we demonstrate these effects in our lives, then we also need to remember that the fourth effect is victory through faith in Jesus Christ.

**Let us quote Paul in Romans 7:25 as we finish “Thanks be to God – though Jesus Christ our Lord.”**