

Born of God

22/3/20 dkm

Read: 1Corinthians 13, 1John 5

Text: 1John 5:1-5

Psalms: 119:97-104, 101,124,134a

To the married people I ask, 'How did life change when you got married?' What did you stop doing, and what did you start doing? If you refused to change in any way I doubt that your marriage lasted long! Becoming a Christian means coming into a relationship with Jesus Christ, a relationship that is more intimate even than marriage. Jesus speaks of the need to be born again in order to enter this relationship (John 3:3). John writes of the believer being 'born of God' (5:1,4). So, how has your life changed since you were born again, and entered into a relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ? Some people think they don't have to change at all when they become a Christian. To them Christianity is a religion they have inherited or adopted rather than a matter of being born again and living a transformed life in Christ. Actually, the believer's new relationship is more like that of a father and child than of husband and wife.

The apostle John was contending with false teachers in the church at Ephesus. These men knew a lot about religion but nothing about being in a relationship with Christ. He began this letter testifying to the humanity of Christ, and the reality of a relationship with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ (1:3). If for you Christianity is just a religion, you will see no need for a change of heart- in fact you will not be able to change your heart. You will not see your sin. You will say, 'I have not sinned'- or words to this effect (1:10). You may like the teaching of the Sermon on the Mount and some of the commandments but will interpret and apply these as you decide. You will decide, for instance, who your neighbour is. You will make no commitment to keeping the commandments of the Bible.

The apostle John gave the church three basic tests they could apply to false teachers, and to themselves, regarding a true or authentic

Christian. Those who claim to believe in God and love God must love Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of God, must love fellow believers, and must obey the commandments of God. We have called these doctrinal, social and moral tests. Here in chapter 5, John begins to summarise and draw conclusions from what he has been teaching. He returns to teaching about the new birth or being born of God (cf. 3:9). It is John who tells us about Jesus and Nicodemus, and being born again in John 3. In this letter he writes, 'Whoever has been born of God does not sin' (3:9).

It is the Spirit of God that gives new birth because our 'flesh-birth' left us dead in trespasses and sin (Eph 2:1). God gives us his Spirit (3:24), and the first work of the Spirit is our regeneration or new birth (John 3:8). The indwelling Spirit produces many fruits in our life (Gal 5:22), but these come after we have become a new creation in Christ Jesus (2Cor 5:17). So when John writes, 'Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God' (5:1), the 'born of God comes first as a completed action and the believing follows as an ongoing action- we know this from the tenses of the Greek verbs. 'Faith is the consequence not the cause of new birth'. The object of our faith is not faith itself but Christ, and the source of our faith is also Christ or the Spirit of Christ.

Belief or faith is not just what we feel in our hearts; it is what is seen in our lives. 'Faith without works is dead' said James (James 2:20). John says that love must be seen in our deeds, as well as our words, if we are born-again Christians (3:18). The verses before us are book-ended by this confession or belief in Jesus Christ the Son of God (5:1, 5). Between the book-ends John writes by way of reminder, and summary, of love, love for God and love for one another, of obedience to the commandments, and of faith that overcomes the world. The apostle Paul similarly highlighted love and faith (1Cor 13:13).

1. Love

A born-again person believes in Jesus Christ and seeks to live as Christ himself lived. Jesus' life was one of love, love for his heavenly Father, and love for the children of God. Jesus showed love for his Father by obeying him. Jesus showed his love for the children of God by healing the sick, the deaf, the blind and the lepers, and by preaching the gospel to them (Mat 11:5). If we are born again of the Spirit of God and believe in Jesus we will do the works that he did (John 14:12). If we have the Spirit dwelling in our hearts we will demonstrate the fruits of the Spirit, the first of these being love (Gal 5:22). We will love fellow believers and help them as we have opportunity.

John continues emphasizing that we cannot say we love God while not loving those who, like us, have been born again of the Spirit of God. We are born again into the family of God, a family that includes fellow believers- you are not an only child! 'One Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all' is how the apostle Paul puts it (Eph 4:5-6).

'If God means little to you, people will become worthless to you, and love even for them will die out' are the profound words of one commentator. People who truly love God are becoming increasingly hard to find in the world, and even in the church. Many talk about loving one another and think they are doing this, but the evidence is not there. Why are families breaking down, with domestic violence and child abuse reportedly on the increase? 'We need tougher laws' they say; 'We need laws that demand love'. But can love be legislated? Love for one another is the outcome of love for God, and love for God is the outcome of God's love for us. 'God is love'; 'if God so loved us we also ought to love one another' (4:8-11). Or, as John puts it here in verse 2 of chapter 5. 'By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and keep his commandments'. The 'social gospel' with its focus on material help, to the exclusion of preaching the gospel, is a false gospel. Paul denounced those who

dared preach another gospel; any gospel that excludes love towards God and obedience to his commands is another gospel.

2. Obedience to His commandments

We are already talking about obedience, about obeying God's commandments, because these things are so tightly knit together. John keeps talking of love and obedience in the same sentence (5:2, 3). He does so because Jesus did so. 'If anyone loves me he will keep my word; and my Father will love him' (John 14:23). John writes, 'This is love for God: to obey his commands' (5:3 NIV). How can we say we love God, or anyone for that matter, if we do not obey what they say? When you see children disobeying their parents do you say those children must really love their parents? The more love there is in the family the more obedience there will be, and the more obedience there is the more love there will be.

Some years ago theologians came up with the term 'a new morality'- some Christians are always looking for something new. This new morality was no longer based on the commands of the Bible; it was based on the principle of love apart from the commandments. And so the guiding principle became, 'Anything that flows from love is permissible as long as no one is hurt'. We know this new morality as the accepted morality of our day. So if you love another woman that is okay as long as your wife is not hurt. Our laws allow for no-fault divorce, and we tell ourselves that divorce need not hurt anyone.

If we love God and love the children of God we will obey his commands. Boice writes, 'The love of God within makes obedience to his commands possible, and the love the Christian has for God and for other Christians makes this obedience desirable'. The God who made us and who showed us true love knows best, and we will be wise to obey his commands. Indeed, he demands that we obey his commands if we say we love him, otherwise we are guilty of lying (2:4). Disobedience demonstrates rebellion or hatred towards God, not love.

‘And his commands are not burdensome’ (5:3). What was that again? ‘Keeping God’s commands is a terrible burden’ you say. Young people in particular think that having to keep the commands of the Bible is terribly restrictive. ‘Mum and dad put these restrictions on me, while my friends are free to go and do as they like’. Sometimes children rebel against keeping the commands of Christ because sometimes parents or elders are more like the Pharisees that they are like Christ. We should be teaching our children that God is love and that Jesus loved them so much that he gave his life for their sins. And we should be praying for our children, or any family or friend, that God would send his Spirit that they might be born again.

When we are born again, love for the world is overtaken by love for God (2:15). If we no longer love the world and the lusts thereof, the commands of Jesus are not a burden but a delight. We will sing the chorus, ‘Things I used to say, I say them no more, things I used to do, I do them no more, places I used to go, I go there no more’. Jesus said, ‘My yoke is easy and my burden is light’ (Mat 11:30). It is the yoke of the world that is heavy and that gives us no rest, not the yoke of Jesus. If you are finding the commands of Jesus a burden, ask yourself if you truly are yoked to him. If you are being swept this way and that by the pulls and pressures of the world it may be because you are following Jesus at a distance.

3. Faith that overcomes the world

The last words of Jesus to his disciples in the upper room were, ‘These things I have spoken to you that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world’ (John 16:33). The Greek word for ‘overcome’ or ‘victory’ is *nike*, a word written on lots of running shoes these days. You may or may not get victory from wearing ‘Nike’ running shoes, but you will get victory through faith in Jesus Christ.

John has already spoken of being born again and believing in Jesus Christ, the Son of God (5:1). He now assures us that this new birth, and the gift of faith, give us 'the victory that has overcome the world' (5:4). Not 'will overcome' but 'has overcome'. Nothing in this world can separate us from the love of God which is in Jesus Christ our Lord (Rom 8:39). Do you believe this? Do you believe that in Christ you have overcome the world, the flesh and the devil? Jesus was victorious over the devil at the cross, and we have victory through our Lord Jesus Christ (1Cor 15:57).

The devil is behind all the evil in this world. The devil was behind the false teachers in the church at Ephesus, teachers whom the believers overcame because of the indwelling of God by his Spirit (4:4). The devil is behind the temptations you face- remember the devil tempting Jesus in the desert (Mat 4:5, 8). The devil is behind the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life (2:16). The devil is behind the ridicule and persecution you experience as a believer- at least many of your brethren are experiencing.

When you are born again and the Spirit of God comes to dwell in your heart you have the power to say 'no' to temptation, and you have the strength to endure hardships for the sake of Christ (Phil 4:13). In other words, you have overcome the world, and by faith will continue to overcome until the world and all its lusts pass away, and only the kingdom of God remains.