

051318 1 John 5:1-5

LOVE 101 Series: "Facing the Terrible Trio"

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(1 John 5:3) "For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments. And his commandments are not burdensome."

Is that so? God's commandments are not burdensome? I have a very hard time keeping them. Don't you?

Even this one basic, central, one-word command that we've been focusing on for the past four weeks, "Love," is super-tough for us to obey. Here's why.

Every single day, we Christians are facing a terrible trio of realities that make it incredibly hard to keep this love commandment. Here's the trio.

First, sinful human nature: I hate to say it, but we're all afflicted with sin from birth. Sin is a natural tendency in me and in you. Each of us is prone to temptation, and inclined to disobey God, by nature. So when he commands us to love? The reality is, we're going to fight. We resist, we rebel, we hold back.

Second, ungodly culture: The culture we live in is increasingly opposed to God's ways. Our society is, more and more, shifting its moral values and its spiritual center away from the God we know and worship. And, whether I like to admit it or not, the culture around me pulls me every day to not obey God's commands; but, frankly, to do the opposite. And you feel that pull, too, don't you?

Third, devil's scheming: The modern world doesn't talk a lot about the devil. But the Bible does. God warns us that Satan is constantly scheming to challenge our faith, to distract us from God, to sow seeds of doubt and spiritual disinterest in our hearts. God commands Christians to love; but Satan is always whispering in our ears, "Don't bother loving others. Just look out for yourself."

We're facing this terrible trio every single day. Our God's commandment is to love. But this trio makes it incredibly hard, incredibly burdensome. How can you and I possibly beat them?

It's like, if I tossed you this basketball, and said, "You have to take on Steph Curry, James Harden, and LeBron James, by yourself." Good luck.

Or, let's say the Avengers aren't available; and you have to battle this terrible trio of villains alone. Or, for those of you into Fortnite, what if you had to face three of the nastiest Battle Royale gamers in the world all by yourself? You wouldn't have a chance against those three.

We go out and try our best to keep God's commandment to love. But we don't have a chance against this terrible trio. By ourselves, we're going to lose that battle again and again and again.

Thankfully, John tells us how to fight, and how to win. He reminds us today that Christians have faith in the One who fights for us. Jesus paid for our sin. Jesus conquered the world. Jesus defeated the devil. And John shows us today that faith in Jesus is crucial when it comes to you and me keeping God's beautiful commandment of love.

John writes, in verse 1, *“Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been born of God ...”* See, we’re born into this physical world. But the sin in our lives cuts us off from God. Sin kills our spiritual relationship with him. But simple faith in Jesus, our Savior, gives us a re-connect with our God. In God’s eyes, we come to life again. If you have faith in Jesus, you’ve been “born of God.”

So, *“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.”* What gives Christians like you and me the ability to love others? Does it spring from some burdensome moral obligation? Or from fear of God’s punishment? No, John tells us, the ability to keep God’s commandment of love springs from the fact that we Christians have been born of God. God loved us so much that he sent his only Son to die for us. We’re forgiven, we’re blessed, we’re privileged every day to revel in the love of our God for us. And love for others springs from that love of God, spills over from that love of God for us.

John goes on. *“By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and obey his commandments. For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments. And his commandments are not burdensome.”*

John tells us why not. *“For everyone who has been born of God overcomes the world.”* John is saying that, because of our connection to Christ – because we have been “born of God” – **we** can be victorious over the terrible trio. *“And this is the victory that has overcome the world – our faith,”* he writes. *“Who is it that overcomes the world except the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?”*

Faith in Jesus Christ is crucial, when it comes to love!

John is not saying that we're suddenly going to become faultless Christians. He's not suggesting that we're never going to sin, or that we should be able to love God perfectly and love our neighbors effortlessly. But John is telling us that when we keep our faith centered on Jesus Christ, the divine power of God's love in us makes it possible for us to love. God's love in Christ really, truly does transform our lives.

The key, when it comes to facing the terrible trio? The key, when it comes to learning to love, as God wants us to? The key, when it comes to life transformation? Keep your faith centered on Jesus Christ!

Read his Word. Build your life on the solid rock of his promises. Receive his Supper. Remember his gifts to you in your Baptism. Get to know Jesus better. Talk to Jesus about your life struggles. Lean on Jesus when you're hurting. Trust in Jesus when you're making decisions about your money, about your career, about your marriage, about your school problems. Keep Jesus in the center of your life, and he'll help you win the fight. He'll help you love.

In the name of Jesus, who teaches us to love. Amen.