

1 John 5:3-7

II. *(vs 3) For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments: and his commandments are not grievous.*

I'm going to make a statement here and I hope that many of you understand what I am saying and don't hear what I am not saying: It is impossible to love God without keeping His commandments. Have I lost my mind? Am I saying that works are the way we are saved? Let me elaborate:

The Apostle here is talking about how we interact with the love of God with respect to our response to His salvation by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone. In evangelism a courtroom metaphor is often used denoting a fine we could not pay, in front of a perfectly just magistrate, paid for by a substitute. So then using that metaphor and expanding on it, how then would you show your appreciation to that intermediary and his sacrifice? By going forth and committing the same crime that landed you in front of that judge?

This is an expansion on verse 2 and the book itself "By this you know you *are* children of God" not, "By this you become.."

When God gives law he is revealing His will, His purpose, His desire, His precepts are good for us and show us the way that we should go. They are a light unto our feet and a guide to our path. They are His guardrails to "How We Should Then Live." The law we speak of here is God's moral law which is summarized in Exodus 20, Deuteronomy 5 and in Matthew 22:37-40 and is found throughout scripture.

This gets into what the Reformers called the Threefold Use of the Law. There are Three Uses of the Law:

- Use One, Called Pedagogical: Warns, informs, convicts, and condemns; in this use the law is a schoolmaster, a taskmaster who requires absolute perfection (Gal 3:24)
- Use Two, Called Civil: Restrains those who don't care about justice or righteousness
- Use Three, Called Moral or Normative: Admonishes and urges the believer in good works

The Apostle here is talking about the principal use of the law for believers. The Greek term used by the Apostle here is *bareiai* ("heavy" - βαρεῖαι) meaning difficult to be borne as a burden, severe. The law of God for believers is not a binding chain that drowns us but something that uplifts us. Matthew Henry had this to say about the relationship between God's moral law and believers:

As God's commands are holy, just, and good rules of liberty and happiness, so those who are born of God and love him, do not count them grievous, but lament that they cannot serve him more perfectly.

Just as too much of, and too little of a good thing are bad there are pitfalls to this. They are Moralism and Antinomianism. Moralism implies that our best efforts at law keeping satisfy God. This is a collapse of justification into sanctification. Antinomianism says that the law of God for believers is annulled by grace. They mean by this that when Paul speaks in Rom 6:14 he means that they are loosed from holy living or following God's commands in worship, life, etc.

"We're under grace not law!!" is the Evangelical Antinomian's cry, usually heard upon being exhorted to holiness. Both are serious errors.

In justification, works is law keeping and grace is freedom. The gospel declares that by Jesus perfect righteousness (keeping of the law) for all His people we have pardon and acceptance. The Holy Spirit enables us to enjoy the keeping of God's commandments not out of striving for salvation, but out of love and desire to please God. The Heidelberg Catechism's 114th question and answer put this very succinctly:

**114. Can those who are converted to God keep these commandments perfectly?
No, but even the holiest men while in this life, have only a small beginning of this
obedience; yet so, that with earnest purpose they begin to live not only according to
some, but according to all the Commandments of God**

What does this mean to us? By the first use of the law, man is incapable (by nature) of keeping the law for our standing with God. We would all justly be condemned for our lack of “perfect and personal obedience” as the WCF puts it. However, our relation to the law has changed by Christ’s perfect obedience and by the Holy Spirit’s enablement and gradual working in us we gradually and graciously conform to it.

John Calvin’s commentary on this issue from his Institutes point towards the usefulness of the law in Christian life

The third and principal use, which pertains more closely to the proper purpose of the law, finds its place among believers in whose hearts the Spirit of God already lives and reigns. For even though they have the law written and engraved upon their hearts by the finger of God [Jer 31:33; Heb 10:16], that is, have been so moved and quickened through the directing of the Spirit that they long to obey God, they still profit by the law in two ways. (2.7.12)

So what can this look like for us in our day to day lives?

Mothers: honoring and reverence their husbands and each other in the Church (Titus 2:1-5)

Children: Obeying your parents for this is right aka honoring your father and your mother (Ephesians 6:1)

Fathers: Family Worship and training your children in righteousness as God has commanded (Deuteronomy 6:6-7)

III. (Vs 4) For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world: and this is the victory that overcometh the world, *even* our faith.

The Greek here gives the idea in every instance that a person is regenerated by God there is victory over the world. Literally “Every thing or All that which is begotten of God,” (*πάν τὸ γεγεννημένον*). Here the neuter is used by the Apostle to denote the universal whole of the regenerate, regarded as one collective body. John assures us that through faith in Christ (the new birth) we are able to discern and stand firm against the world. This echoes the words of Christ: Be of Good Cheer I have overcome the world (John 16:33). Jesus overcame sin and death. Death has lost its sting for Christians (1 Cor 15:55-57). Jesus has put Satan under His feet and tasted death for us to save us (The Protoevangelium in Gen 3:15). He is coming back to gather His church and make His “enemies [His] footstool”. So then what things must Christians overcome as they travel this life? They are namely: Sin, The World, The Devil

Sin:

Christians still struggle with indwelling sin in this life. Anyone who denies this is a liar as John has said back in chapter 1. There is a popular group on Youtube who often travel around to college campuses or other public places and make a stumbling block of their conduct and words and not the gospel. Included in these often

coarse messages is the proclamation that they no longer sin, and Christians upon conversion no longer sin. Anyone who does sin, isn't a Christian. It's a heresy called Sinless Perfectionism. The believers struggle against sin is oftentimes a back and forth, with Christians struggling with assurance (Rom 7:24-25), it is likened to a war of attrition in which ground is gained and lost over and over again. The struggles by believers against indwelling sin are most often likened to a struggle between two dogs in modern evangelical circles, a good dog and an evil dog waging war. This is incorrect. The biblical position is that something definite occurred in regeneration. The entrance of the Holy Spirit dispositionally changes a person so that he proceeds down a new path in life. Entrenched patterns of sin and unbelief obscure the way, and they must be rooted out and mortified. Yet, the Christian is one person *imperfectly* living out his one nature. He is no longer a sinner, characterized by wickedness, but a saint characterized by righteousness. There is an ongoing struggle with the presence and remains of sin in our human nature until death. The Westminster Confession puts it like this:

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I. They, who are once effectually called, and regenerated, having a new heart, and a new spirit created in them, are further sanctified, really and personally, through the virtue of Christ's death and resurrection,[1] by His Word and Spirit dwelling in them:[2] the dominion of the whole body of sin is destroyed,[3] and the several lusts thereof are more and more weakened and mortified:[4] and they more and more quickened and strengthened in all saving graces,[5] to the practice of true holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord.[6]

II. This sanctification is throughout, in the whole man:[7] yet imperfect in this life, there abiding still some remnants of corruption in every part:[8] whence arises a continual and irreconcilable war, the flesh lusting against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh.[9]

III. In which war, although the remaining corruption, for a time, may much prevail:[10] yet, through the continual supply of strength from the sanctifying Spirit of Christ, the regenerate part does overcome; [11] and so, the saints grow in grace,[12] perfecting holiness in the fear of God.[13]

The World/The Devil:

Christians must also overcome the world and the Devil. In "A Body of Divinity" Thomas Watson the Puritan author says this regarding the believer's struggle against the world and the Devil: "It must not be expected that the devil will let those rest who are laboring to destroy his kingdom." The World when used in scripture has several various meanings, it can mean the Earth, empty professors of faith, or when used in another sense it denotes the systems of ideologies and false religions in which Satan presides over as a "god" (2 Cor 4:4).

Examples of this can be seen in ANTIFA, a Communist organization that demands that all worldly injustices end right now and be put right immediately because there is no recompense after this life, Neo-Nazis who

assert that not all human beings are made in the *imago dei* and some are less than human, Islam which asserts that Christ did not die on the cross and was not fully God and fully man, LGBTQ jihadism, Mormonism, etc. So how do we overcome the world? Regenerated believers by the power of the Holy Spirit see through such idolatry. One of the fruits of regeneration is faith, this faith enables its possessor to overcome evil worldviews and customs by which the world operates. A heart of stone replaced with a heart of flesh is enabled by the Holy Spirit to overcome the “strong delusion” (2 Thessalonians 2:11).

This results in Christians bearing witness to the gospel by our speech, our actions, customs, even sometimes our manner of dress. This often means being strangers in a strange land. This in turn results in persecution and attacks from the World and the Devil. Sometimes this results in political and social repression because we refuse to say “Caesar kyrios” Caesar is Lord. In the Greek “witness” is *martus*. The act of bearing witness to the gospel in the face of earthly or satanic power displaying raw power as if God. Enabled by the power of the Holy Spirit, Christians scoff at firing squads, beheadings, imprisonment, torture, and disenfranchisement. If you kill us we rise again! The world *still* is not worthy of us.

Before we go too far, note that we are in the world not of it. We are not to shy away as some anabaptist groups (Amish) or Fundamentalist Baptists do and hide in a “Christian Ghetto” of our own making. We are exiles, Christ left us here to shine the light of His kingdom. He left us here to be His servants, we will be vindicated, so we pray for those who persecute us and show love to our enemies.

What does this look like practically for us?

It looks like 2 Cor 10:5, we take every thought captive and cast down arguments that set themselves against Christ. This means we can use the messages that the world pumps out of every place at a firehose pace to strengthen our Christian worldview and practice giving a reason for the hope that is within us. The way to strengthen our worldview apart from just the apologetic training in our worldview, is to be in constant prayer and strengthen ourselves by the reading of God’s word, by fellowship with other Christians, partaking in the Christian Sabbath, called the Lord’s Day, Family Worship, etc. A.W. Pink said the following about Christians overcoming the World and the Devil and it captures the essence of what Christians are to do:

“While we look not at the things which are seen—but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal” (2 Corinthians 4:18). The more the substance of the heavenly world engages the heart, the less hold will the shadows of this earthly world have upon it.”

IV. (Vs 5) Who is it that overcomes the world except the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?

Here the Apostle is confirming his previous thought through an appeal to the readers, namely that the believer is victorious because he is born of God. The believer is an overcomer because he makes a specific confession about Christ and who Christ is.

A person who has been regenerated by the power of the Holy Spirit and received a new heart believes that Jesus is the Son of God, 2nd Person of the Trinity, *monogenes theos, homoousis* with the Father (as confessed by the Ecumenical Creeds), without sin, that He lived a perfect life and died a saving death and by believing on Him through faith and faith alone by grace alone to the glory of God alone, we are able to overcome the world, sin, and the Devil.

Who do you say that Jesus is? Muslims say that He was merely a razoul (prophet) who was only made to appear to die on the cross and that we must work our way to heaven. It is popular in our culture to say that Jesus was merely a Leftist revolutionary who advocated peace and love who was not really fully God or fully man, who did not speak about the wrath due sin and sinners. Not to mention blasphemous depictions of Jesus in entertainment media. Liberal Theologians in mainline churches blaspheme Jesus by saying that he would be “horrified by people starting a religion and worshipping him and he certainly didn’t rise from the dead.” Who do you say He is?

On the Last Day everyone will see Christ coming in glory at the right hand of the Father and will give an account and answer that question from their knees with “Jesus is Lord.” Whether they believe so or not. To judgment or to everlasting life. I implore anyone who hears this message, don’t have the wrong answer.

V. (VS 6) This is he who came by water and blood—Jesus Christ; not by the water only but by the water and the blood. And the Spirit is the one who testifies, because the Spirit is the truth.

There are a variety of interpretations on this passage and some lead into the understanding of the controversial 1 John 5:7 passage (more on that later).

Most modern commentaries on this verse believe the Apostle is referencing Jesus’ baptism and death recorded in the gospels. This understanding is based on an understanding that John was refuting a heretic who asserted that Jesus became the incarnate word at His baptism or only appeared to be incarnated. In verse 6 John would be saying that Jesus was incarnate God from birth to death.

Clement of Alexandria supposes that by "water" regeneration and faith were denoted, and by "blood" the public acknowledgment of that.

The notes of the Geneva Bible follow what seems to be a position similar to Clement:

He proves the excellency of Christ, in whom only all things are given us by six witnesses, three heavenly, and three earthly, who wholly and completely agree together. The heavenly witnesses are, the Father who sent the Son, the Word itself, which became flesh, and the Holy Spirit. The earthly witnesses are water, (that is our sanctification) blood, (that is, our justification) the Spirit, (that is, acknowledging of God the Father in Christ by faith) through the testimony of the Holy Spirit.

The main point being that by the Incarnation of Christ, His atoning death, and His Word and Sacrament, we are justified and sanctified.

VI. (vs 7)

I’m only going to brush up against this verse as I am not in a position to fully exposit the nuance’s of it and there are a variety of positions on it. I bring it up mostly because it is an apologetic point. Muslims will use 1 John 5:7 as “proof” that the scriptures are wholesale unreliable and have been “corrupted.” Jehovah’s Witnesses will use 1 John 5:7 to assert that the Trinity is a demonic doctrine asserted by a Church council from a church which mass “apostasized” from the truth.

I encourage everyone to come to their own conclusions on this.

If you have a King James Version or any text derived from the Textus Receptus you'll notice that you have *"For there are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost: and these three are one."*

1 John 5:7 is a controversial text for several reasons:

There are two textual critical camps or methods. There is the Critical Text Position and the Majority or Ecclesiastical Text position. The Critical Text refers to modern textual criticism which uses variant readings, based on certain criteria established by the style of translation the authors wish. The CT position asserts that 1 John 5:7 is not authentic due to a claim of it being found only in a 16th Century collection known as Codex Montfortianus and only before that as a Latin marginal note which found its way into the Greek. The Majority or Ecclesiastical Text position holds that 1 John 5:7 should be included as authentic because God has supernaturally preserved his word through the texts used by the Church and so the authoritative version of the scriptures is the one the Church has always used.

The Westminster Divines, Cyprian, Matthew Henry, John Gill, and a few others believed 1 John 5:7 to be an authentic text.

Hugo Grotius, Wescott, Scrivener, and Phillip Schaff consider the text to be inauthentic.

I don't name drop in order to convince you to line up behind a position because so and so held it. It is crucial that we be "ready to give an answer for the hope that is within us" to those who would seek to undermine the *theopneustos* nature of scripture.

Conclusion,

The three main applications I wish to leave you with today are these:

- I. Obedience to God's Law by Christians is not for the purposes of justification but of sanctification.
Those who are regenerated joyfully obey God's law out of a desire to serve Him
- II. A Christian overcomes sin, the world, and the devil through the Holy Spirit's enablement
- III. The Christian is an overcomer due to a specific confession about Christ.
- IV. A Christian is an overcomer due to the incarnation and justification provided by Christ's atoning life and death.