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# *The Epistles of John*

“True Love is the Spirit’s Gift”

## **1 John 5:1-12**

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**L**ove or law? At the extreme end of the spectrum both pull individuals away from God to a life of either self-absorption or works. And often the “false prophets” control their followers by the use of one of these extremes or another. Certainly, many want to follow those who teach “love means never having to say you’re sorry.” This appeals to those who want to live by their own rules.

On the other side, those whose life is typified by pride want to believe they can make God accept them because they are deserving of His approval and recognition. Of course both approaches are self-destructive.

Consider the burden of having to earn your way into God’s approval. Think about the grim picture presented to the Jehovah’s Witnesses.

“ While religious denominations may talk of salvation by faith or by character, Russell and Rutherford (**founders of the cult**) hammer into the thickest skull of the simplest-minded devotee that there is a mansion in heaven for no one who does not devote his days and nights unto the hour of death itself—to the high calling of door-to-door canvassing and propagandizing. There is no other test of “faithfulness.” It matters not what one believes or what one does, he is doomed to extinction unless he incessantly witnesses in the prescribed manner. Rutherford says: “While on the earth those who receive God’s approval must be witnesses to the name and kingdom of Jehovah. In no other way can they be faithful and perform their commission (**Riches**). “If Jehovah’s witnesses should fail or refuse to deliver the message, they would be unfaithful to God and would suffer destruction” (**His Vengeance**).<sup>1</sup>

What a way to live. And Mormons too live under the burden of law. No, failure for them doesn’t mean destruction. But the fulfillment of Mormonism only comes with a lifetime of bondage to law.

“ ... conditional or individual salvation,” otherwise known as exaltation or godhood, goes far beyond a mere resurrection from the dead. McConkie explained:

Salvation in its true and full meaning is synonymous with exaltation or eternal life and consists in gaining an inheritance in the highest of the three heavens within the celestial kingdom...Salvation in the celestial kingdom of God, however, is not salvation by grace alone. Rather, it is salvation by grace coupled with obedience to the laws and ordinances of the gospel.

Unlike resurrection from the dead, exaltation requires a concerted effort on the part of the individual to live according to all the commandments. It means keeping all the commandments as instructed by the LDS Church for a person’s entire life.”<sup>2</sup>

But the Christian is subject to the Law of Love and his salvation is not self-dependent, it is God-dependent. And it is truth and love together that demonstrate the reality of salvation.

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<sup>11</sup> Gerstner, John, H., The Teachings of the Jehovah’s Witnesses, Baker Book House, Grand Rapids, MI, 1985, p. 14.

<sup>2</sup> McKeever, Bill and Eric Johnson, Mormonism 101, Baker Books, Grand Rapids, MI, 2000, p. 151.

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**I Introduction****II The Object of Belief****III The Evidence for Belief****IV Conclusion****Verses 1- 5****Verses 6-12**

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**I Introduction:** We have been talking a lot about the importance of love. And in some environments, the focus on love has become so central that the importance of truth is lost. This is why in some churches essentially anything goes. These people claim that because God is loving, therefore all “love” comes from Him. Consequently, how can anything defined as love be sin or unacceptable? So for these individuals, belief is defined by a meaningless concept of love.

At the other end of the spectrum belief is defined by works. Instead of an “anything goes” attitude, we get an almost nothing goes approach. Law, rules, and commands define the chance to be saved and anything short of “perfection” means failure and lack of salvation. Obviously neither approach has anything to do with a biblical view of God’s plan for restoring a fallen humanity.

**II The Object of Belief: Verses 1-2:** Generally we recognize that because we are children of God, we can expect the same rejection from the world that rejected Christ. In fact, Jesus stated:

*“Remember the words I spoke to you: ‘No servant is greater than his master.’ If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also. If they obeyed my teaching, they will obey yours also” (John 15:20).*

A fact we often seem to miss though is the counterpoint to the world’s rejection. This is the principle that those who love God love His children. And, conversely those who love His children, love God. The two concepts are inseparable. Christ’s commands to believers are to love God and love others. If we say we love God, then we must love one another. And if we love one another, then we must be loving God.

As we’ve pointed out on previous occasions, we are not talking about emotional feelings towards God and people. These require nothing. We are talking about *agapé*. Godly love requires action towards God and others. Our love must reflect obedience in action.

Notice that belief in Christ, and all that belief implies, means the believer is a child of God. The next fact is that a child of God loves the Father. This is the natural response of a child to the Father’s love. God first loved us, therefore as His children we love Him.

*“We love because he first loved us” (1 John 4:19).*

We in turn love one another. We do so because the natural consequence of being loved by God, and in turn loving Him, should be obedience to His commands. And, we are commanded to love one another. We can not overemphasize the importance of the love demonstrated between believers. Love of one another is so much a part of what should be the Christian life, that if it is not practiced by an individual there is reason to question the reality of

salvation. We are not saved because we love one another. But, clearly, because we are saved, we should show this love.

**Verses 3-5:** We show God we love Him through our obedience. We've talked about this before. To say that one is a believer, but at the same time claim there is no need to be involved in the local church, no matter what the argument, is to say there is no need to be obedient.

This was essentially the message of the false teachers. They said they loved God. But they taught that how one lives doesn't matter. John says the contrary, if one claims to love God the proof is obedience.

John makes a claim though that seems contrary to what we have experienced. He says the commands of God are not burdensome. *Then why do God's commands feel like burdens?* And since he is talking about the command to love, he is saying by extension that to love one another is not burdensome.

***“Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light” (Matthew 11:29-30).***

Because we are believers, the Law of love is not a burden. We carry it out in dependency on the indwelling Spirit. But, for those of the world, obedience to God is a burden. As believers we have overcome the world, and therefore we don't have to be burdened by obedience. *By the way overcome is used here is the same as used by John in the letters to the seven churches. To be a believer is synonymous with being an overcomer.*

The reason we are overcomers is because of our faith. This faith is grounded in the incarnation and all that implies: His death, burial and resurrection in payment for our sins. We are overcomers because we are saved. And because we are overcomers, we do not have to feel burdened by obedience to God. We obey because we love. But for others, their understanding of commandments is a burden. For example, for the Jews obedience had become a burden.

***“Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You travel over land and sea to win a single convert, and when he becomes one, you make him twice as much a son of hell as you are” (Matthew 23:15).***

The problem was that they had fallen into a work-based theology. They didn't serve God out of love. They served out of fear of the consequences of breaking the Law. And, because of how the Law was handled, it was a burden. This has always been true and continues to be true still. Consider this example from the work *Shabbos*.

*“The status of a vessel or tool is dependent upon the one to which it is put. Identical leather pouches can be used to carry gold coins or children's marbles. If the former, the pouch is a wallet; if the latter, it is a toy. The laws of the Sabbath employ this concept. One of the forbidden labors is **carrying from domain to domain**. Such carrying constitutes a punishable offense, however, only if an item of significance is moved. The Talmud gives examples of such measurements: if the amount transported is too small to be considered of reasonable value, the carrier is not considered to have violated the Scriptural prohibition.*

*In the case of a vessel, if it is used as a container, its status in terms of the Sabbath laws depends on the contents. For example, if one transports an empty silver cup from his apartment to the street, he is in*

violation because the object of his interest is the cup itself. If, however, there is wine in the cup, then his motive is to move the wine from one place to another; its utility in **that particular act** is purely as a vessel by means of which the wine can be carried, even if the cup is worth more than its contents.

*But the cup itself was still transported! Why should the presence of an insignificant ounce or two of wine nullify the considerable value of the silver cup? The answer is that Sabbath labor is Scripturally forbidden only if it is ... a labor done with intention and forethought. As long as the intended accomplishment involved the contents, the container is considered only an accessory. The reality is defined by the motive.”*<sup>3</sup>

**III The Evidence for Belief: Verse 6a:** John wants to make it very clear just what it means to believe in Christ. As we have previously noted the false prophets then, and now are serving a different Christ.

*“For if someone comes to you and preaches a Jesus other than the Jesus we preached, or if you receive a different spirit from the one you received, or a different gospel from the one you accepted,...For such men are false apostles, deceitful workmen, masquerading as apostles of Christ” (2 Corinthians 11:4, 13).*

The key to a biblical understanding of Christ is accepting His being part of the Tri-unity of the Godhead and His propitiatory work on the cross. He shed His blood to pay the price of our sin. He came by water and blood. Too many of those who teach a false doctrine of Christ say that His teachings are fine, but His shed blood isn't necessary.

**Verses 6b-9:** *What are the witnesses to the truth of the Gospel?* The biblical criteria for a validation of truth is two witnesses.

*“...so that ‘every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses” (Matthew 18:16).*

And so John provides three witnesses to the incarnation, and the work of Christ. These are the Holy Spirit, the water and the blood.

This was probably John's response to those who were teaching that the Christ Consciousness came upon Jesus at His baptism and left prior to the crucifixion. John, says no, it was Jesus who came in water and blood. First, we see the testimony of Jesus' baptism—the water.

*“The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, “Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world! This is the one I meant when I said, ‘A man who comes after me has surpassed me because he was before me.’ I myself did not know him, but the reason I came baptizing with water was that he might be revealed to Israel.” Then John gave this testimony: “I saw the Spirit come down from heaven as a dove and remain on him. I would not have known him, except that the one who sent me to baptize with water told me, ‘The man on whom you see the Spirit come down and remain is he who will baptize with the Holy Spirit.’ I have seen and I testify that this is the Son of God”” (John 1:29-34).*

Next, we see the testimony of Jesus' death on the cross—the blood.

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<sup>3</sup> Finkelman, Rabbi Shimon, Shabbos The Sabbath—Its Essence and Significance, Mesorah Publications, Ltd, Brooklyn, NY, 1991., p. 20-21.

*“Now it was the day of Preparation, and the next day was to be a special Sabbath. Because the Jews did not want the bodies left on the crosses during the Sabbath, they asked Pilate to have the legs broken and the bodies taken down. The soldiers therefore came and broke the legs of the first man who had been crucified with Jesus, and then those of the other. But when they came to Jesus and found that he was already dead, they did not break his legs. Instead, one of the soldiers pierced Jesus' side with a spear, bringing a sudden flow of blood and water. The man who saw it has given testimony, and his testimony is true. He knows that he tells the truth, and he testifies so that you also may believe” (John 19:31-35).*

John notes that people are willing to accept the testimony of men. He may be saying to his readers, “You have been willing to listen to the testimony of the false teachers. You have been considering false teaching. But, the testimony of God is greater than the testimony of men.” We know that the incarnation is true because God has provided the validation of it.

**Verse 10:** The belief in Christ, as He presents Himself, is proof that God has been working in the heart of the believer. It is only through the testimony of the Holy Spirit that we are even capable of accepting the gospel message.

John wants to make sure that no one misses his point. It is only in accepting the incarnation that one can be saved and indwelt by the Holy Spirit. No matter what the false prophets were saying they were calling God a liar by rejecting the truth of who Christ is.

**Verses 11-12:** *What is the best witness to the non-believer?* Finally, John reminds his readers what is at stake. To believe in Christ according to the testimony of God is to receive eternal life. But to reject God's witnesses means to face God's eternal judgment.

To follow the false prophets means hell. To follow Christ means heaven. Knowledge isn't an issue of semantics. It is the product of a saving relationship with God. Those who were trying to draw the believers out of the church had nothing to offer but destruction.

And certainly today's teaching that the time of the church is over, that the Holy Spirit has departed, is a prime example of false teaching and an attempt to mislead God's children.

**Conclusion:** The three factors that are found in the life of the believer are faith, love and obedience. Their presence is both the outward sign of salvation, and the product of that salvation. As we abide in Christ, these qualities grow in proportion to our dependency on Him.

The absence of these factors in an individual is an outward sign of the likelihood of the absence of salvation. John has explained all this specifically to help believers learn to distinguish false prophets from true teachers of God's word.

This means we can hear someone teach something that is incorrect, and not automatically write them off as a false teacher. For example, the evangelical who has recently accepted the alienation theory. He now believes the lost do not spend eternity in Hell, but are destroyed at judgment. While clearly this is contrary to the teaching of Scripture, nevertheless, his faith in Christ remains orthodox. He always demonstrates the love of God in his life. And, his life is

a testimony to his obedience to the Lord. Being wrong in a teaching of Scripture doesn't make one a false prophet.

On the other hand, to be wrong about who Christ is precludes one from being a believer. And if the person rejects the Christ of Scripture while purporting to speak for Him, then that person is a false prophet and a liar. And, from John's perspective the most obvious clue to these individuals is their lack of love.

John makes it quite clear that for the Christian, love must be as much a part of the life as salvation itself. If we do not allow God's love to flow through us, we must repent. We must turn to the Lord and ask Him to show us what we need to do to demonstrate His love towards others. And the first thing we must do is take this truth from the theoretical and accept it as an absolute must for our lives.

## **Rock of Ages, Cleft for Me**

Psalm 94:22

*Rock of Ages, cleft for me,  
Let me hide myself in thee;  
Let the water and the blood,  
From thy wounded side which flowed,  
Be of sin the double cure,  
Save from wrath and make me pure.*

*Not the labors of my hands  
Can fulfill thy law's demands;  
Could my zeal no respite know,  
Could my tears forever flow,  
All for sin could not atone;  
Thou must save, and thou alone.*

*While I draw this fleeting breath,  
When mine eyes shall close in death,  
When I rise to worlds unknown,  
And behold thee on thy throne,  
Rock of Ages, cleft for me,  
Let me hide myself in thee.  
Amen. <sup>4</sup>*

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<sup>4</sup> Toplady, Augustus M., "Rock of Ages, Cleft for Me," public domain.

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<b>IV</b>	<b>Conclusion</b>	

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### **I Introduction:**

### **II The Object of Belief: Verses 1-2:**

*(John 15:20; 1 John 4:19)*

*(Matthew 11:29-30; 23:15)*

### **III The Evidence for Belief: Verse 6a:**

*(2 Corinthians 11:4, 13)*

**Verses 6b-9:**

*(Matthew 18:16; John 1:29-34, 19:31-35)*

**Verse 10:**

**Verses 11-12:**

**Conclusion:**

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Personal Application: Last week we talked about making a list of the different ways we can demonstrate God's love to those around us, both within and without the body. If you made the list, now consider how you can act on it.

**Prayer for the Week: Lord, let me love others with Your love. In Jesus' name, amen.**