

## **Back To Basics**

### **God's Commands Are Not A Burden**

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

## **Introduction**

In this letter, John weaves together several proofs of spirituality. He writes about:

- The belief that Jesus is God's Son, the Savior/Messiah of the world.
- How believers are to respond to God's moral guidance, and
- How we must learn to give God's love to others.

In 1 John Chapter 5, John brings all three of these points together. Verse 1 says, "Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God, and everyone who loves Him who begot also loves him who is begotten of Him. By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and keep His commandments." (1 John 5:1-2)

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

We accept the first part, "This is the love we have for God: that we obey his commands," but the second part - is it really true that "His commandments are not burdensome?" My guess is that sometimes we all view God's commandments as burdensome.

But John says, "His commandments are not burdensome." Why would John say this? What was his secret? Look at verse 4, For whatever is born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith. Who is he who overcomes the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?" (1 John 5:4-5)

God's commandments are not burdensome when we put our trust in Jesus. Somehow, our love and trust in Jesus overcome the heaviness of God's commandments. When God's commands seem burdensome, it's usually because we aren't fully trusting Jesus.

Let's explore why God's commandments sometimes feel burdensome and how trusting Jesus frees us from this burden.

## **I. It's Always A Burden When We Try to Earn God's Acceptance.**

Have you ever tried to bargain with God or earn His favor by promising to keep His commandments? If we view God's commandments as a way to earn his acceptance, they will definitely feel like a burden.

I can think of a couple of reasons we do this. (You can probably think of some more!) Sometimes we instinctively think we need to earn God's acceptance by doing good works. Sometimes we think God gave us His commandments to show us how to climb His ladder of success by keeping His commandments.

But God says this whole religious mentality is wrong. God did not give us His commandments for personal achievement. Paul explains this in Rom.3:19, when he says, "Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God. Therefore by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight, for by the law *is* the knowledge of sin." (Romans 3:19-20)

No one can *ever* be made right with God by doing what his law commands. Then why did God give us his commandments? Could it be that He wants to make it clear to us that we fall short of his standard, to blow away our excuses, and to convince us that we are under his judgment—so we'll seek his acceptance through the other means he has provided?

Religion tries to make God's commands less burdensome by diluting them so that earning his acceptance is easier or by saying that as long as we do more good deeds than bad deeds, God will accept us. But God hates this perversion of his commands because it obscures our true moral guilt and breeds false security. He insists that his commands involve external religious practices and our heart attitudes. Anything less than perfect obedience is unacceptable. James 2:2 says, "For whoever shall keep the whole law, and yet stumble in one *point*, he is guilty of all." (James 2:10)

To keep from being burdened by God's commands, we must be convinced that there is another way to be accepted by God. Paul says you are ready for some very good news. In Romans 3:21, he writes, "But now the righteousness of God apart from the law is revealed, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, even the righteousness of God, through faith in Jesus Christ, to all and on all who believe. For there is no difference; for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:21-23)

Notice what God is offering us. God offers to freely and permanently accept us (make you right in his sight), entirely apart from your obedience and no matter how badly you have broken his commands. In verse 24, he says, "being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God set forth *as* a propitiation by His blood, through faith, to demonstrate His righteousness, because in His forbearance God had passed over the sins that were previously committed, to demonstrate at the present time His righteousness, that He might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus." (Romans 3:24-26)

How can God offer this to us? He can offer this because his Son Jesus Christ paid the price for us! Jesus took the punishment for our sins when he sacrificed his life for us on the cross. It was the fulfillment of what God promised in the Old Testament prophecies and sacrifices. God was fair and just when he did not punish those who sinned in former times. And he is fair and just in this present time when he declares sinners to be right in his sight because they believe in Jesus.

How do we receive God's offer? Well, you don't clean yourself up first, and you don't have to make any promises or vows. You humbly admit that you can't earn God's favor on your own, so you put your trust in Christ's death to do it for you. When you make this decision, you will experience a tremendous sense of relief.

God's commands are not a burden because Jesus has paid the price for your sins, for your failure to keep God's commands. Romans 5:1 says, "Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ" ([Romans 5:1](#))

Do you have this kind of peace? If not, why not ask God to accept you through Jesus' death right now? It's important to keep your focus on God's acceptance of Christ's sacrifice as the foundation of your relationship with him. "I am accepted because of you, Jesus!" ought to be the automatic response of our heart every day! It is a response that is always relevant to our spiritual condition.

It's always a burden when we try to earn God's acceptance. We can never earn God's favor through our own self-efforts. Our joy and freedom come through faith in Christ and Christ alone!

## **II. It Is Always A Burden When We Use Our Own Resources to Try and Keep God's Commandments.**

Once we accept Christ and have peace with God, what are we supposed to do about God's commands? Well, even though we don't earn God's acceptance by obeying them, we still want to serve him and realize that he does want us to follow them. The problem is when we assume that we must do this with our own resources.

Christians burn out because they think they have to do a bunch of things in order to be faithful and please God. That idea always leads to a burdensome Christian life. It leaves you feeling like you must do your duty even if it wears you out rather than being thankful and grateful for the privilege of serving God. Jesus talks about this in Matthew 11, "[Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light.](#)" ([Matthew 11:28-30](#))

He speaks to those who want to follow him but feel bone-weary and crushed because they're trying to pull the yoke of God's commands by themselves. He says to get in his yoke—let him guide you and supply the strength to pull—because with His added strength, the burden will be light, and you will have that deep-down rest for your soul.

It's not that you put forth no effort and feel no stress but that his power courses through you, and his peace guards you. Paul said, "Him we preach, warning every man and teaching every man in all wisdom, that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus. To this *end*, I also labor, striving according to His working which works in me mightily." ([Colossians 1:28-29](#))

To the Philippians, he writes, "Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus." ([Philippians 4:6-7](#))

It's always a burden when we try to use our own resources to keep God's commandments. Learn to rely upon the strength of Christ each day!

### **III. It's a burden when we think God's Commands are designed to restrict or exploit you.**

Satan always tries to make you think God's ways are too hard and burdensome. But when you trust that God's commandments actually fit the way God created us, they become invitations to freedom and experiencing more of God's goodness and freedom from our sinfulness and fallen nature.

God said to Israel in Deuteronomy 10, "And now, Israel, what does the LORD your God require of you, but to fear the LORD your God, to walk in all His ways and to love Him, to serve the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, and to keep the commandments of the LORD and His statutes which I command you today for your good?" (Deuteronomy 10:12-13)

The Apostle Paul says, "And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what *is* that good and acceptable and perfect will of God." (Romans 12:2)

You'll quickly feel the burden if you mistake human commands for God's commands. If you reverse God's ethical priorities you'll quickly feel the burden. Our relationship with God can be hindered when we try and earn His acceptance through our performance or obedience to His commands.

Often, we try to follow His commands with our resources, leaving us alienated and forgetful of His love for us. We need to focus on God's promises and ask Jesus to guide and empower us. As a result, we will develop a renewed awareness of God's love and an ability to rest in His grace and lean on our brothers and sisters for help in our weaknesses.

### **Conclusion**

How do you trust Jesus in this way? What does it look like to get in his yoke?

*Number One, Focus more on God's promises than on his commands.*

When you focus on his commands and lose sight of his promises, it weighs you down. But when you focus on his promises, it releases the Holy Spirit's power to transform you. Read and reflect on God's promises in scripture. Christ did not come to condemn you; he came to give you life and peace. When you accept Christ, his presence gradually changes you and makes you a better person. He works through all of your circumstances for your good. He is always watching over you and wants to help you. Focus on Christ's presence with you each day, and you will start to relax in the confidence that he is always with you and there for you!

*Number two, Ask Jesus for guidance and empowering strength in every situation.*

Galatians 5:25 says, "If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit." (Galatians 5:25)

The emphasis is on continually allowing his Spirit to lead and empower you. You can't store up Jesus' power (like recharging a battery)—you must continually depend on him to empower and guide you. Of course, you need him for the really big stresses of life, but you also need him in every situation in everyday life. The more you turn to him and ask for His help, the lighter the load gets.

*Number Three, Lean on your brothers and sisters in Christ.*

We tend to read Matthew 11 passage about being yoked as individualistically ("just Jesus and me"), but the "you" is plural. We are to get into Jesus' yoke *together*. That is why Paul says we should bear one another's burdens—because it is in this way that we fulfill the law of Christ (Gal.6:2). You can't follow and serve Jesus by yourself. You have to let other Christian friends into your life. You have to let them know what your burdens are (DOUBTS, TRIALS, SINS, FEARS) when you are burdened (not after they're gone) so they can help you bear them. You have to let Jesus comfort and encourage and remind you of his promises through them. You need to pray with them about your burdens and let them pray for you.

One thing I have learned in my years of following Jesus is this: "The issue is never the size of the burden—it is always who am I yoked with." Whose yoke have you been in lately? Are you yoked in Christ with the right people?