



1 JOHN

## WE LOVE

1 JOHN 3:23

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### MAIN IDEA

God has given His people two commands that ought to direct all of their lives. The first command is the foundation of all: faith in Christ. The second necessarily follows: love one another.

### INTRODUCTION

*As your group time begins, use this section to help get the conversation going.*

- **Who are children expected to obey? Has this expectation changed over the past generations? Think back to your childhood. Who were you expected to obey?**
- **Do any specific instances come to mind regarding obedience or disobedience in your childhood? What motivated you to obey specific people?**
- **Who or what are some authorities you recognize today? What is your motivation for obeying them?**

Authority and submission are key elements in all societies, but the way authority and submission are viewed may be very different between cultures. Sometimes, expectations of obedience are different among different people in the same society. Much of social interaction, commerce, and government hinges upon a clearly defined system of authority and compliance. Without these social systems, there would be chaos. We obey the government, our parents, teachers, police officers, our bosses, flight attendants, street signs, laws, and societal norms.

Christians have an authority that trumps all other authorities. The one true and living God is the ultimate authority for those who profess Christ. Furthermore, this God has provided a clear and unchanging revelation of His will for those who would follow Him. The Scriptures are vital for Christians because they express the will of their ultimate Authority.

As we study today's passage, let's consider the authority of God over those who claim the name of Christ.

## UNDERSTANDING

*Unpack the biblical text to discover what Scripture says or means about a particular topic.*

> Have someone in your group read 1 John 3:23a.

- **Who is the highest authority in your life? How does someone's authority affect how you relate to them?**

Each of us lives under varying authorities. Government officials, bosses, teachers, coaches, and pastors all serve as authorities to whom we submit in different ways. Just and righteous authority is a great blessing in the lives over whom they rule.

The Christian's greatest authority is God and His commands made clear through His Word. The authority of God overrules all other authorities in the Christian's life. Christians must say

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with Peter and the apostles, “We must obey God rather than people” (Acts 5:29).

Today’s verse begins with the important information that a command has been given. Commands are issued by authorities. Otherwise, they are merely suggestions. For example, a fan may yell all day long from the stands at a sports team, but the only person who has the authority to command, correct, and chastise the players on the team is the coach. The coach has the authority and the power.

There are lots of competing messages in our lives. We hear counsel, direction, and correction from countless sources. But who is our “coach”? Who really has the authority to direct us? For the Christian, this authority belongs to God alone.

- **Why do Christians need an authority in their lives? Should this authority be despised? Is it oppressive? What would be the result if people didn’t have God’s authority to rest in and submit to?**

God’s authority in the lives of His people is a great mercy and kindness. It is a wonderful thing to find that God is the authority over one’s life. If left to ourselves, we will mess things up. This is true of Christians and non-Christians alike. The difference is that Christians can walk in obedience to God’s Word because they have been made alive by His Spirit who gives them the ability to walk faithfully before Him.

Yet, Christians still make a mess of things because the shadow of the old nature hasn’t completely disappeared. They must continue to fight against the sin nature. They don’t have the power, wisdom, or ability to live according to God’s will on their own. This spiritual disability is prevalent and pervasive. That’s why God’s authority in the lives of people is a wonderful, merciful, and needed thing. It’s far from oppressive or constrictive.

When Christians have no authority to rest in and submit to, they will do what is right in their own eyes. They will follow their own desires, make decisions based on their emotions, and obey their deceptive hearts. Christians are to submit to God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ in every area of their lives. They fail at this, of course, but in Christ they find forgiveness and grace to redouble their meager efforts. Indeed, they find themselves empowered by the Lord's grace and strength. They desire to obey God because they love God and have been rescued from hell.

- **Do you rejoice that you are a creature under authority? How do you submit to and rest in the authority of God?**

> Have someone in your group read 1 John 3:23b.

The first command the apostle makes clear in this verse is to believe in the name of Jesus Christ.

- **Why do you think this is the first command given? How is it more important than other commands? Why is it critical to have faith in Jesus Christ?**

Time and again the Scriptures call those who fear God to faith. For example, Proverbs 3:5 says, "Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not rely on your own understanding." Faith is a defining characteristic of the people of God. Yet, faith is not, in and of itself, of any value. Remember, all people place their trust in something. Adherents of all religions exercise faith in something. Faith only avails life if the object of that faith can truly give life. John told his readers to place their faith in Jesus Christ.

Jesus is the only worthy object of faith because He is the only atoning sacrifice for the sins of people. Faith is the vehicle by which sinners can access the benefits God has made available. Faith in any other object will yield no eternal gain.

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It's also important to note that faith in Christ is ongoing. In other words, Christians keep believing upon Christ for salvation. This faith doesn't stop after they are born again. On the contrary, their faith in Christ for salvation only grows more fervent. Furthermore, they learn to trust God for all things, in addition to salvation from sin.

According to Proverbs 3:5, Christians should trust God and not lean on their own understanding. Those two exhortations are two sides of the same coin. One goes with the other. It is impossible for a person to trust God and lean on their own understanding at the same time. They cannot both trust themselves and trust God at the same time. We must continually fight the temptation to trust ourselves and take matters into our own hands.

- **How can we keep watch over our hearts so trust in God prevails and self-confidence does not? What is produced when someone has true, vibrant faith in Christ?**

In seeking trust in God, Christians must remember His character and purposes. God is both good and powerful. His arm is not too short to save and all that He does is good. God is also holy. There is no darkness in Him at all. His purpose for Christians is motivated by His love, mercy, and grace. Further, His purpose is to conform His people into the image of Jesus Christ. Come what may, Christians can trust that God is accomplishing His purpose in them. Romans 8:28 says, "We know that all things work together for the good of those who love God, who are called according to his purpose."

We might say faith is made up of two parts: an inward reality and an outward response. This is what James meant when he said, "faith, if it does not have works, is dead" (James 2:17). True, saving faith is faith that will work. Faith produces fruit and fruit is proof of our faith. Knowledge alone is insufficient to save anyone, and good works are inadequate to save anyone (Matthew 5:20; James 2:19). A person's actions can't save them, but they do reveal the faith of a person.

- **In what ways has your faith been tested and strengthened throughout your Christian life?**
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> *Have someone in your group read 1 John 3:23c.*

John also told his readers that they should love one another. Those who believe in Christ love others. Faith works. True faith isn't simply a logical assent, it is a full abandonment. Those who look to Christ for salvation give themselves to Him and His will. Christians surrender themselves to the will of God and deeply desire to live in a way that pleases Him.

Pharmacists don't hoard medicine but distribute it appropriately. Waiters don't take plates of food out back to eat but deliver them to the tables that they are serving. Likewise, Christians shouldn't withhold the grace of love from their Christian brothers and sisters or their neighbors.

- **How can Christians show love to their brothers and sisters in Christ?**

One of the most important ways Christians can love one another is by ministering to one another through exercising spiritual gifts. Spiritual gifts should not be hoarded or manipulated for self-exaltation. Their intended purpose is the building up of the church. God's intention for His spiritual gifts is that they would be used not for the possessor's benefit, but for the good of others. Christians are to love others by serving them through their spiritual gifts. Those who don't are not being faithful stewards.

Matthew 25:14-30 provides a potent illustration of this reality. In this passage, Jesus told the parable of the talents. Those who faithfully stewarded their talents to produce an increase were praised, the servant who did not steward his talents well was punished. Christians are to love one another through stewarding their talents by investing them in their local congregations for the good of their brothers and sisters to the glory of God.

- **What does the command to love others have to do with the gospel of Jesus Christ?**

The more a Christian embraces and treasures the saving work of God on his or her behalf, the more they will embrace the good works for which God saved them (Ephesians 2:8-10). As Christians grow in their love for and devotion to God, they will find themselves saying with Christ, “My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work” (John 4:34). When Christians do biblical good works with a gospel-motivation, then they are refreshed, blessed, and strengthened in their souls.

- **How have you been uniquely gifted to love your brothers and sisters in Christ? How is God calling you to love others through your gifts?**

## APPLICATION

Christ died on the cross not only to save Christians, but also so Christians could love one another. How valuable that service must be! And how precious are those who Christians love if Christ would die that they might be loved and served!

- **Where do you struggle to submit to God as your authority?**
- **How does your belief in Jesus impact your daily life? How is God speaking to you in this regard?**
- **What are some ways you can love your brothers and sisters in Christ? How might you love those outside the church so they might also come to know the love of God in Jesus?**

## PRAY

Ask the Lord to give you humility as you consider the fact that He is your authority. Pray for grace to remember that you were bought with a price and that you are not your own. Pray also that the Lord would nourish both faith and repentance in you and that you would not neglect to come back to that foundation daily. Finally, ask the Lord to teach you how to love your brothers and sister in Christ as well as your neighbor.

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## I JOHN 3:23-24

What commands must we obey if we are to be fruitful in prayer? We must believe in Jesus and love one another. These two ideas stem from the same attitude of the heart, and John sees them as one command. To do one is to do the other. Those who obey God's commands live in him, or abide in him. Similarly, John 15 links abiding with obeying (15:9–10).

### Notes:

The way we can know that he lives in us is by the Spirit he gave us. There are several views on this passage.

1. The Charismatic View. This view sees reference here to the charismatic gifts, such as gifts of prophecy, healing, etc. (The NIV Application Commentary, 171). Since the letter is devoid of other clear references, this seems unlikely.

2. The Inner Witness View. This view says the Holy Spirit gives us an inner conviction, an inner assurance that we are true Christians. This also seems unlikely, since this would play into the hands of the antichrists who taught that secret, inner knowledge was the sign of divine enlightenment.

3. The Life Witness View. This phrase looks forward to what John is going to say—not back to what he has said. First John gives four tests of true Christianity: (1) moral character, (2) love of the brethren, (3) obedience to God's commands, and (4) confession that Jesus is God in the flesh. Immediately after John mentioned the Spirit which God gave us, he launched into a serious warning not to trust just any spirit, but to test the spirits. He suggested a threefold test:

- Doctrine: Every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God (4:2).
- Love: Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God (4:7).
- Obedience: This is love for God: to obey his commands (5:3).

The Holy Spirit produces doctrinal purity, love for the brethren, and a spirit of obedience to God's commands. When we see these three things, we can be confident that he lives in us. They are the unmistakable signs of the Holy Spirit's presence in our lives.<sup>1</sup>

### REFERENCE

1. David Walls and Max Anders, *I & II Peter, I, II & III John, Jude*, vol. 11, Holman New Testament Commentary (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1999), 198–199.