

Max Fernandez

Certainty: Absolute Truths that Produce Joyful Assurance
Love; Certainty; Truth; Born Again; Son of God

Faith, Content of

It was the great Augustine who said, “If you believe what you like in the gospel and reject what you don’t like; it is not the gospel you believe, but yourself” (449).

Many ethnic groups decorate eggs for special events, especially Easter. In some cases, the decoration is so much work that to preserve it, the egg is first emptied of its contents through small holes in both ends. When you see the eggshell, it looks perfectly normal. But, although it is beautiful, it is not a real egg. For what would happen if you tried to make a cake, or cookies, or eggnog with one of those beautiful “eggs”? Of course, it wouldn’t turn out right because the egg was empty of content. Like an egg, the real value of faith is its content (Green, 134).¹

The passage before us not only describes the faith of a believer, but it also distinguishes this faith. This distinction is necessary within a culture that is confused about Christian faith, and if we are not sure what true faith is, then there is no true joyful assurance that will result. **Consider that some people think “faith” is an option.** However, everyone believes something. The question is whether the faith you are exercising is in Someone or something that has guaranteed true victory or not.

The Faith of a Secular Hedonist

Is faith in the pursuit of personal happiness really going to end well? For Philip Rieff, professor of Sociology, “the latest player on the historical stage....was the psychological man — a type characterized not so much by

¹ Michael P. Green. (2000). *1500 illustrations for biblical preaching* (p. 134). Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books.

finding identity in outward directed activities as was true for previous types but rather in inward quest for personal psychological happiness.”²

How can this be truly tested? It cannot be objectively or scientifically tested. Is not the quest for personal happiness a belief about life? Yes. It is a belief that if someone lives true to themselves (or who they perceive themselves to be) and does what makes them happy, then they have reached the goal of life. In the end, this is faith that is being exercised by an individual.

The Faith of an Atheist

For some, they may say that they don't believe in God, but even that conviction is a matter of faith. Why? Are you able to disprove the existence of God? No. God cannot be taken into a laboratory for testing. The scientific method may provide you evidence, but the evidence is not proving that God does NOT definitively exist. Thus, positive or negative conclusions about God's existence are matters of faith.

The Faith of Modern-Day Galatian Christians

Modern-day Galatian Christians are Christians who received the gospel of grace but tend to find their identity in how they perform Christian duties to meet the expectations of others. In Schmidt's book, he calls this the “traditional identity”:

Traditional identity essentially says you are accepted, secured, and significant as you take responsibility to live out your life for the good of others — which is both selfless and selfish. It satisfies others' needs as well as your own.... Be good and you'll have a strong self.³

In this case, the Christian began with faith in the sufficiency of Christ but then transferred or divided that faith between Christ and Christian good works - for self-worth or personal identity.

Everyone believes something, and even Christians need to assess their faith and the Object of their faith. **The question is whether the faith you are actively exercising is in Someone or something that has guaranteed true, ultimate**

² Trueman, Carl. *The Rise & Triumph of the Modern Self*, p. 45.

³ Schmidt, Cary. *Stop Trying*. Chicago: Moody Publishers, p. 58.

success or not. True, full joy is NOT found by faith in the pursuit of personal happiness, faith in the non-existence of God, or even faith in being good so I can be stronger. “For John, true faith always leads to love for God and others, and true love always results in obedience” (Akin, 4. Obey God and Experience the Victory of Faith (5:1–5)).⁴

What would John tell us today? **Live joyfully obedient through genuine faith in Jesus Christ.** Consider the full joy that John wants for his readers:

1 John 1:4 KJV 1900

⁴ And these things write we unto you, that your joy may be full.

We cannot assume that we are exercising this kind of faith. For this particular lesson, we will merely see how this faith is described — how it is distinguished.

(1) Love for your Christian siblings is evidence of victorious faith in Jesus.

[1 John 5:1](#)

1 John 5:1 KJV 1900

¹ Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ is born of God: and every one that loveth him that begat loveth him also that is begotten of him.

Confession

Particular confession is in [1 John 5:1,5](#) that Jesus is the Christ of God.

John is not trying to show how a person experiences the new birth; his aim is rather to indicate the evidence which shows that a person stands in the continuing relationship of a child to God his Father: that evidence is that he holds to the true faith about Jesus... The perfect tense of the verb *gegennētai* suggests a past action with results that continue in the present. In other words, Smalley concludes, “The regenerate Christian (past) must constantly live out (present) his faith in

⁴ Akin, Daniel L. *1, 2, 3 John*. Vol. 38. The New American Commentary. Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2001.

Jesus as Messiah, and also give his sustained allegiance to the love command” (Akin, 150-151).⁵

The author is not addressing the question of incorporation into the family of God but rather looks only at its result. “Believing” in Jesus (present tense in Gr) is a direct consequence of our “having been born” (perfect tense in Gr) of God and therefore becomes a “test” or proof of that birth (Gaebelein et al.).⁶

- › **Kid’s Pause:** Only those individuals who continually affirm this confession have this kind of faith.

Love

In addition, John has spoken much about love as genuine evidence of relationship. This love is not an erotic love or an earned love. This love is gospel love that is manifested towards others like the love God had shown to these believers ([1 John 3:16](#), [1 John 4:16](#)). Here, the basic truth is that those who really believe that Jesus is the Christ are born of God, and they will love their siblings.

What is meant by love? How do we know if someone is just using the word “love” frivolously? In the book that we have recently given out, Author Mack Stiles identifies three views of love. These are pop culture’s perspectives of love: (1) Sentimental, (2) Universal and Unconditional, and (3) Me-Centered.

1. Pop culture believes God’s love is sentimental

Sentimental love bleeds into the Christian mind in a form of niceness. It's easy to confuse nice with compassion, kindness or love. But nice is not a biblical word.⁷

2. Pop culture believes God’s love is universal and unconditional

This is the kind of love that believes that true love lets anyone do anything

⁵ Akin, Daniel L. *1, 2, 3 John*. Vol. 38. The New American Commentary. Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2001.

⁶ Gaebelein, Frank E., Leon Morris, Donald W. Burdick, Edwin A. Blum, Glenn W. Barker, and Alan F. Johnson. *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Hebrews through Revelation*. Vol. 12. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1981.

⁷ Stiles, Mack. *Marks of a Messenger*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2010. Kindle Edition, Loc. 728-29.

they want.⁸

3. Pop culture believes God's love is me-centered

Me-centered love easily bleeds into Christian thinking about God's love. We start thinking God's love is about my world and me.⁹

- › **Kid's Pause:** Only those who are continually loving their Christian siblings have this kind of faith.

Let an office puff up no one, **for faith and love is everything, to which nothing is preferable.** But observe those who hold divisive opinions concerning the grace of Jesus Christ that came to us; how opposed they are to the mind of God. For love does not concern them, no concern for the widow, none for the orphan, none for the afflicted, none for the ones imprisoned or the ones set free, none for the hungry or the thirsty. — Ignatius of Antioch¹⁰

(i) Faith about Christ is specific for new birth. You can say that you have faith IN Christ, but if you do not have a particular kind of faith ABOUT Christ, then you are not born of God.

(ii) Husbands, there is an important application here. Your love for your wife is a powerful testimony to the kind of faith you are exercising.

(iii) Natural affection — our world is increasingly showing a lack of what is called *natural affection*. Children killing parents, husbands killing wives, parents killing unborn children...etc. Let it be known that Christians should not reflect the virtueless Cain, but rather Christians should love other Christians well.

- › **Kid's Pause:** If you are really believing in Jesus Christ, then you are loving other Christians well.

⁸ Stiles, Mack. *Marks of a Messenger*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2010. Kindle Edition, Loc. 735-736.

⁹ *Ibid.*, Loc. 756.

¹⁰ Ritzema, Elliot. *300 Quotations for Preachers from the Early Church*. Pastorum Series. Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2013.

(2) Joyful obedience to God is evidence of victorious faith in Jesus. [1 John 5:2-3](#)

1 John 5:2-3 KJV 1900

² By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God, and keep his commandments. ³ For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments: and his commandments are not grievous.

Notice that the commandments of God are not *burdensome*. There is a freedom — a liberty — associated with obedience to the commandments of God. The kind of love in this passage is one that is evident by joyful obedience to God's command — in particular the command to love your Christian siblings.

Joyful – Our hearts have been changed by God.

God's moral standards are high, but God gives the Christian grace to be able to live up to that standard (cf. 4:4). **“Love-prompted obedience is not a crushing burden that exhausts the believer's strength and destroys his sense of freedom in Christ”** (Akin, 163).¹¹

Obedience – Our lives manifest the heart change for God.

Our hearts have been changed so that we might live lives for God.

“Love for God is not an emotional experience so much as a moral commitment” (Akin).¹²

John 14:15 KJV 1900

¹⁵ If ye love me, keep my commandments.

¹¹ Akin, Daniel L. *1, 2, 3 John*. Vol. 38. The New American Commentary. Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2001.

¹² Ibid.

This verse offers a protection against a kind of love that is purely sentimental or emotional (especially important for that context). True love — true faith — will increasingly be evident by obedience.

(i) Parents, if you love God, then you will love your children by obediently raising them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.

(ii) Wives, if you love God, then you will love your husbands by obediently striving to reverence them as God has commanded you.

(iii) Teens, if you love God, then you will consider carefully the word of God so that you might know how you can be more Christlike around the gathering of the church. It is an overwhelming self-love that leads a person to isolate and incubate themselves from the body.

Parents, we have become guilty of nurturing a generation that thinks social interaction is “live gaming,” but what is missing on “live gaming”? The same things that are missing when you are relegated to only watching services online or interacting through Zoom...etc. These teens/young adults interact in a virtual world, and their lives show little to no care for others in the real world. We can no longer justify this under the banner of introversion. Even the most introverted Christians are compelled by love for God to obey God in loving others. Otherwise, God’s command is vain.

- › **Kid’s Pause:** If you are truly believing in Jesus Christ, then you are joyfully obeying the commandments of God.

(3) Victory over the world is evidence of victorious faith in Jesus. [1 John 5:4-5](#)

1 John 5:4-5 KJV 1900

⁴ For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world: and this is the victory that overcometh the world, *even* our faith. ⁵ Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God?

The World - [1 John 2:15-17](#)

The world, for John, is inclusive of all the lusts and pride noted earlier in this letter.

Overcometh - Conquer

The translation of v. 4 in English obscures the Greek wordplay. The NIV translates the Greek verb *nikaō* as “overcome” but translates the Greek noun *nikē* as “victory” (Akin, 166). A translation that keeps the root the same in English would read: “**For everyone born of God conquers the world. This is the conquering that has conquered the world, even our faith**” (167). John uses the present tense, which indicates that believers are currently experiencing the victory (168).¹³

John can say this because Jesus overcame the world. Jesus became flesh, and manifested love, joyful obedience, and victory as he lived in this world. Anyone who has true faith in this Jesus will reflect the same love, obedience, and victory.

- › **Kid’s Pause:** If you are truly believing in Jesus Christ, then you will be overcoming the temptations of the world.

Summation: Love, joyful obedience, and victory are marks of this true faith.

What is the greatest obstacle to living out this truth for a non-believer? (and believer)? For some, a misplaced faith. The greatest obstacle to your joy is unbelief or a misplaced faith in seeking happiness through fulfillment of your lusts. For some, the greatest obstacle to this truth is seeking happiness through fulfillment of lists.

It was nearing Christmas, and I received a phone call from a man who needed to talk to a counselor. I met him at my church office, where he told me his tale of woe. A decade earlier he had killed his wife in a fit of anger, was convicted of manslaughter, and spent several years in prison. He and his wife had a daughter who was in the custody of his in-laws. He had not seen her since the crime.

¹³ Akin, Daniel L. *1, 2, 3 John*. Vol. 38. The New American Commentary. Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2001.

Now, as Christmas neared, his heart ached. Tears streaming down his face, he lamented, “I could pass her on the streets of this city and not even know who she was.”

What I remember most about our counseling session, however, was what he said when he first walked into my office. Dramatically raising his arms, he said, “Now, preacher, let’s just leave Jesus out of this, OK?”

As he sadly went his way that day, I thought to myself, *That’s the whole problem. You’ve left Jesus out of everything.*

— Phil LeMaster, Grayson, Kentucky¹⁴

[Psalm 40:8](#) is key. Do not attempt first to love, obey, and conquer. First, come to Christ, who gives you the heart to love, joyfully obey, and conquer.

Psalm 40:8 KJV 1900

⁸ I delight to do thy will, O my God: Yea, thy law *is* within my heart.

For Christians, we battle against our sinful nature. Our greatest obstacle is ourselves. Some give in to temptation only to find it empty. Christian, your love, joyful obedience, and conquering must have the right starting point. The finished record — imputed to you — is that starting point. How has Christ shown that faith in him is the only way to have a full joy and absolute assurance of relationship?

Jesus has overcome the world ([John 16:29-33](#)).

Jesus has modeled this kind of selfless love.

Jesus has equipped us for this kind of selfless love.

The commandment to obey is not burdensome because Jesus has given to us the perfect record of obedience to this command. In this perfect record we can rejoice, and from this perfect record we can joyfully obey. **Christians, your starting point is forever and always the finished work of Jesus Christ.**

¹⁴ Larson, C. B., & Ten Elshof, P. (2008). *1001 illustrations that connect* (p. 377). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House.