

Born of God 1 John 5:1-6

Happy Mothers' Day to all! You are a mother, aunt, cousin, friend that has given some form of mothering to another and for this we say thank you and we praise God for you and that special ministry that women uniquely give to this world. However our sermon is not exactly about motherhood or women in particular...it is about being born of God and what that means for women and men within the church.

First I must tell you that I came from a congregation where the minister seemed to end each sermon with an admonition that we love one another. In fact it didn't matter what the passage of scripture his sermon concluded in the same manner. When I asked him about this he said he was going to keep preaching on love until we got it right. Unfortunately after ten years of preaching he was still preaching and teaching on love. He is too ill to preach any more, but if given the opportunity he would still be preaching on love one another.

The writer of first John wrote about love, and if I am counting properly this is our fourth sermon from first John and the last two have been on love. On the last Sunday in April our scripture was about love in action; last Sunday we were instructed to love as Christ loved; and today John says that we are born of God and teaches that we are to love the children of God and when we love God we obey God's commandments.

John gives us the secret to joyful obedience as children of God. It is for us to recognize that obedience is a family matter. We are serving a loving Parent and helping our brothers and sisters in Christ. We have been born of God, we love God, and we love God's children. And we demonstrate this love by keeping God's commandments.

The story is told of a woman visited a newspaper editor's office, hoping to sell some poems she had written.

"What are your poems about?" the editor asked.

"They're about love!" beamed the poetess.

The editor settled back in the chair and said, "Well, read me a poem. The world could certainly use a lot more love!"

The poem she read was filled with moons and Junes and other sticky sentiments, and it was more than the editor could take.

"I'm sorry, but you just don't know what love is all about! It's not moonlight and roses. It's sitting up all night at a sickbed, or working extra hours so the kids can have new shoes. The world doesn't need your brand of poetical love. It needs some good old-fashioned practical love."

D.L. Moody often said, "Every Bible should be bound in shoe leather." We show our love to God, not by empty words but by willing works. We are not slaves obeying a master; we are children obeying a Father. And our love is a family affair.

One of the tests of maturing Christian love is our personal attitude toward the Word of God in which God's will for our lives revealed. When we are immature Christians we consider Biblical instructions demanding and burdensome. We are somewhat like little children who are learning to obey, and who ask, "Why do we have to do that?" or "Wouldn't it be better to do this?"

But as we mature as Christians we experience God's perfecting love and find ourselves enjoying the Word of God and truly loving it. We don't read the Bible as a textbook, but as a love letter.

The longest chapter in the Bible is Psalm 119, and its theme is the Word of God. Every verse but two (Ps. 119:122, 132) mentions the Word of God in one form or another, as "law," "precepts," "commandments," etc. But the interesting

thing is that the psalmist loves the Word of God and enjoys telling us about it! “O how love I Your Law!” (Ps. 119:97) He rejoices in the Law (Ps. 119:14, 162) and delights in it (Ps. 119:16, 24). It is honey to his taste (Ps. 119:103). In fact, he turns God’s Law into a song: “Your statutes have been my songs in the house of my pilgrimage” (Ps. 119:54). Imagine turning the words of God’s laws into songs. Most of us do not consider laws a source of joyful song, but this is the way the psalmist looked at God’s Law. Because he loved the God, he loved God’s Law. God’s commandments were not grievous and burdensome to him. Just as a loving son or daughter happily obeys the parent’s rules, also a Christian with maturing love joyfully obeys God’s command.

In the same way that we mature in our relationships with our mothers and fathers and obey them out of love and respect because they gave us life, as our Christian love for the God matures, we have confidence and are no longer afraid of God’s will. We also are honest toward others and lose our fear of being rejected. And we have a new attitude toward the Word of God: it is the expression of God’s love, and we enjoy obeying it. Confidence toward God, honesty toward others, and joyful obedience are the marks of maturing love and the ingredients that make up a happy Christian life.

We cannot try to please God in our own strength because the burden is too heavy. But Jesus promised that He would help us. The yoke that Christ puts on us is not burdensome at all (Matt. 11:28–30) because love lightens burdens. But you say “Brenda, we Christians live in a real world that has formidable obstacles. It is not easy to obey God. It is much easier to drift with the world, and ‘do my own thing.’”

My answer is that you, Christian, are “born of God.” This means at your baptism you were given the divine nature which gives you the power and strength to obey God. “For whatever is born of God overcomes the world” (1 John 5:4,

NASB). When we allow this new, divine nature to control us, we obey God. The divine nature helps us grow in our faith and as we grow in our faith we grow in love. The more our love for Christ matures, the more our faith in Christ matures; because faith and love mature together.

I participated in two worship services in the past two days. One was a leadership conference at a church in Hazel Park. The preacher was the Rev. Cynthia Hale, pastor of the 5,000 member Ray of Hope Christian Church in Decatur, Georgia. Her sermon was “The Rewards of a Different Spirit.” What she said is that God has already given us power and authority but many of us are afraid to do what God has empowered us to do. The second experience was the Regional Assembly yesterday and Rev. Bob Oliveira prayed that we would see God’s abundance in our lives and not look with fear and think of where there is scarcity. Most of us trust our earthly mothers and fathers and we can surely trust the promises for God who is our gracious and loving Heavenly Parent who wants only the best for us. But we must have faith and love by spending time in prayer, study, and meditation each day; in the same way we spend time with the parents that we love and respect.

There is an old story which is a kind of parable of this. Someone once met a lad going to school long before the days when transport was provided. The lad was carrying on his back a smaller boy who was clearly lame and unable to walk. The stranger said to the lad, “Do you carry him to school every day?” “Yes,” said the boy. “That’s a heavy burden for you to carry,” said the stranger. “He’s no’ a burden,” said the boy. “He’s my brother.”^{1 2 3}

¹Wiersbe, Warren W.: *The Bible Exposition Commentary*. Wheaton, Ill. : Victor Books, 1996, c1989, S. 1 Jn 5:1

²Walvoord, John F. ; Zuck, Roy B. ; Dallas Theological Seminary: *The Bible Knowledge Commentary : An Exposition of the Scriptures*. Wheaton, IL : Victor Books, 1983-c1985, S. 2:900

I read an article in the May 2nd Christian Century magazine. It related to our scripture. It was called “Small acts of courage.” In the spring of 1939, 47-year-old Paul Gruninger was a middle-level police official in a picturesque Swiss town near the Austrian border. The son of middle-class parents and a mediocre student, he seemed conventional. After serving in the Swiss army in World War I, he obtained a teaching diploma, settled into a position at an elementary school, attended church on Sundays and married Alice, a fellow teacher. To please his mother and his wife, Paul applied for a better-paying position in the police department where he filled out reports and arranged security details for occasional visiting dignitaries. Or so it seemed.

In April 1939, Paul found his way to work blocked by a uniformed officer who told him: “Sir, you no longer have the right to enter these premises.” An investigation had revealed that Paul was secretly altering the documents of Jews fleeing Austria for the safety of Switzerland. “Non-Aryan” refugees were not allowed to cross the border after August 19, 1938, but all it took was a few strokes of Paul’s pen to predate a passport and perhaps save a life, a small action but one of great personal risk.

Paul was dismissed from his position, ordered to turn in his uniform and subjected to criminal charges. The authorities spread false rumors that he demanded favors for his aid. Disgraced as a law breaker and shunned by his neighbors, Paul peddled raincoats and animal feed until he died in poverty in 1972. His story along with so many others is featured in a book called *Beautiful Souls*, a study of seemingly ordinary people who exhibited extraordinary and risky courage on behalf of others. Because we are born of God, we are to be like our elder brother and take up our cross daily and follow him.

³ Barclay, William, lecturer in the University of Glasgow (Hrsg.): *The Letters of John and Jude*. Philadelphia : The Westminster Press, 2000, c1976, S. 101

Paul was an unassuming man whose family and faith formed him in a world in which anyone who saw what he saw...“the screaming and crying of mothers and children...could not bear it anymore...could do nothing else.”

Paul and his wife are buried together near their little Swiss town. Seventy years later a plaque was placed at the foot of Paul's grave. It reads: “Paul Gruninger saved hundreds of refugees in 1938/39.” At his funeral, a choir sang “Nearer My God to Thee,” and a rabbi read from the Talmud: “He who saves a single life, saves the entire world.”

What an exciting way to live! Because we are born of God, God's love matures in us, we have confidence toward God and do not live in fear. Because fear is cast out, we can be honest and open; there is no need to pretend. Because we are born of God and because fear is gone, our obedience to God's commands is born out of love, not terror. Because we are born of God we discover that God's commandments are not burdensome. Because we are born of God and live in this atmosphere of love, honesty, and joyful obedience, we are able to face the world with victorious faith and to overcome instead of being overcome by the world.

We are born of God...let's go and do likewise. Amen