

A photograph of a light brown dog with a white patch on its face, sitting in the passenger seat of a car. The dog is looking out the window with its eyes closed, appearing relaxed. The background shows a blurred green forest. The text is overlaid on the lower half of the image.

**Commandment Keeping
in 1 John**

Patrick J. Griffiths

Commandment Keeping in 1 John

Revised 11/14/13

Copyright © 2013 Patrick J. Griffiths
Published by Torn Veil Publications

Waukesha Bible Church
553 W24079 Glendale Road
Waukesha, Wisconsin 53189
www.waukeshabible.org

All rights reserved. No part of this booklet may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means—electronic, mechanical, photocopy, recording, or otherwise—except for brief quotations for the purpose of review or comment, without the prior permission of the publisher.

Scripture taken from the NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE®, Copyright © 1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977, 1995 by The Lockman Foundation. Used by permission.

An Introduction

In the study of the Bible several initial thoughts might prove helpful. First, the Bible came to us from God. It is an inspired book. In fact, it is the only book ever written by God through human instrumentation. Second, the Bible tells a single *Story*. This *Story* has six broad “acts”: God, Creation, Rejection, Redemption, Re-Creation and Joy through Worship. Third, at the center of this *Story* is Jesus. He is God’s means of rescuing the fallen, reversing the curse and restoring everything back to its original design. Fourth, in reading the Bible different approaches can be employed. They are as follows.

1. Historical theology looks at theological thought within its historical **development**. It provides a snapshot of thought. It speaks to what people thought during a specific period within church history.
2. Biblical theology considers thought as presented by a **single book** of the Bible or by a **single author** such as the Gospel of Luke and the Book of Acts or the 13 Letters written by the Apostle Paul.
3. Systematic theology seeks to take all of the various categories touched on by the various books and **catalogue** common themes.
4. Finally, dogmatic theology gives **labels** to groupings and presuppositions made by Systematic theology such as Dispensational or Covenant Theology and Reformed and Arminian Theologies.

The short readings you are about to encounter focus on biblical theology within the author’s historical context. The Apostle John wrote the Gospel of John, the three Letters of

John and the Book of Revelation. These readings will only focus on his first Letter. Although this is the limitation of the study, it is not inconsistent with anything anyone would read elsewhere. What such a study does do is force us to wrestle with what Pastor John is saying and not read into the text something that is not being said by the Apostle. Each study has a thorough reading of the various passages. Although it might prove daunting initially, the return on this small investment is notable.

So enjoy. May the following readings drive you into the text and then through the text to Jesus. Truly, He is beautiful.

Commandment Keeping in 1 John

Often in our discussion of “commandment keeping” we lean toward thoughts of obedience. In such a discussion commandment keeping and obedience become very much man centered. We define our obedience by what we do and often it is a means of earning or meriting God’s favor and blessing. Although the idea of commandment keeping or obedience is rather large, we will consider the idea only as it is found in 1 John. In this short study we will see how commandment keeping and loving one’s brother and continuing in the local assembly because one believes God’s record are inseparably linked.

The keeping of His commandments is often tied directly into the perseverance of the saints. Those who persevere are saved. A theological dilemma exists because we see commandment keeping as optional rather than as a fruit of believing. If you do not keep His commandments, you do not believe in Jesus. Yet believing in Jesus causes commandment keeping. In 1 John they are inseparably linked. Those who do not keep His commandments are lost.

For us to understand Pastor John’s meaning we must look at the idea not only in its literary context but also its historical occasion. Two conclusions will be made. First, loving Jesus causes a love for His people. Second, in this context His people are the local church.

The intent of this study is to capture Pastor John’s pointed statements concerning “loving one another” and “loving their brother and sister in Christ.” What did he mean when he said,

“We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brethren. He who does not love abides in death” (1 John 3:14).

It is my own perspective that he did not mean anything other than a localized gathering that was geographically defined. His loving the brethren was not abstract or indefinable. His idea of the church universal was represented by local churches and not individual Christians apart from local churches. For Pastor John the church universal was made up of local churches.

No individual in the early church would claim to be the church. Every Christian is a part of the church, but they are not the church. The church exists in the community of the gathered.

When we fast forward two thousand years a perspective exists which drives a significant wedge between one’s confession of Jesus and one’s community of faith, thus separating the two. Some believe one can be “saved” and not a part of a local church. Thus, it is thought one can have the head without needing the body. Again, I recognize that such high talk concerning one’s alliance to a local church is foreign to our current way of thinking of such things.

Within the New Testament there is a strong emphasis placed on the Church in the life of the believer. Christians need to recognize that the Church is fundamental to the Gospel and the Christian life. Sadly, much of evangelicalism fails to make this connection and, consequently, fails to appreciate the Church as having anything other than a purely instrumental significance for believers.¹

But Pastor John is going to say if you do not love one another or the brethren then you are not saved. In his context, loving one another or the brethren referred to the local assembly where Pastor John exercised oversight. How does he view the local church?

Pastor John's response of loving one another is in contrast to those who had left the local assembly (1 John 2:18, 19) and rejected the authority of Pastor John and the leaders of those churches (1 John 4:6; 3 John 9-11). Those who either left of their own volition or were removed through church discipline would perhaps have claimed to love the "brethren," but they did not love the church they had left.

Pastor John refers to the believer as one who is "born of God." He uses the word "seed." Pastor John saw salvation as God's "seed" fertilizing our "egg." When His seed fertilizes our egg a body is formed, life is produced. The resultant life is evidence that God's seed has fertilized humanity's egg. If there is no life, there was no fertilization. Pastor John defines that life as loving one's brother which is the keeping of His commandments. Loving one's brother and keeping His commandments are not the seed. These actions are not the energy or life force behind the resulting life. The seed of God fertilizing the egg of humanity produces life. Remaining in the Church and keeping the commandments are the result of God's seed.

If the process is aborted and a miscarriage takes place, then life stops. There is no fruit from the fertilization. This is what is referenced in the parable of the soils (Mark 4:1ff). The first three soils are the consequence of a process that is stopped.

Now, I recognize that by leaving this discussion in the abstract either by individualizing it to specific people or broadly defining it to all Christians everywhere leaves us more comfortable since its application is impossible. But Pastor John is referring to those who refuse to listen to his leadership and have left the local assembly. They, specifically, do not love the brethren or one another because they refuse to listen to Pastor John and they have left the local church. Thus, it is in this context he connects loving your brother with loving God.

Notice with me the parallelism of these two passages.

1 John 3:22-24	Matthew 22:36-39
<p>22 and whatever we ask we receive from Him, because we keep His commandments and do the things that are pleasing in His sight.</p> <p>23 This is His commandment, [1] that we believe in the name of His Son Jesus Christ, and [2] love one another, just as He commanded us.</p> <p>24 The one who keeps His commandments abides in Him, and He in him. We know by this that He abides in us, by the Spirit whom He has given us.</p>	<p>36 "Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?"</p> <p>37 [1] And He said to him, "YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, AND WITH ALL YOUR SOUL, AND WITH ALL YOUR MIND."</p> <p>38 "This is the great and foremost commandment.</p> <p>39 [2]"The second is like it, 'YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF.'</p>

Pastor John unashamedly speaks of believing in Jesus as the INCARNATE CHRIST, THE SON OF GOD. It is an unavoidable conclusion. He equally says you cannot claim to love God if you do not love Jesus as the Christ and thereby you love one another. It is the love one has for Jesus that enables and pushes one to love one another. He links

the two actions together by cause and effect. It is a love for God that causes us to love Jesus and one another.

What I believe is necessary is to see how what Pastor John says is what Jesus taught. Of all the commandments inside of the first covenant one command [love the Lord your God] causes all of the others to exist and all of the other commandments are captured in one simple statement, "Love your neighbor." The simplicity and severity of this truth is found in the summary statements.

"On these two commandments **depend** the whole Law and the Prophets" (Matt. 22:40).

"There is **no other commandment greater** than these" (Mark 12:31).

"And a lawyer stood up and put Him to the test, saying, 'Teacher, **what shall I do to inherit eternal life?**'" (Luke 10:25).

If Pastor John were asked the question, "What shall I do to inherit eternal life," he would respond by saying "believe in the name of His Son Jesus Christ and love one another, just as He commanded us."

Those two ideas are inseparably linked. The consequence/effect of loving one's neighbor is caused by believing in the name of His Son Jesus Christ. Yet any who claim to believe in the name of His Son Jesus Christ has affection for His people, the Church. And this church is not in the abstract or generic. It is very concrete and personal. It is the assembly, the local church, those assemblies that are geographically defined with biblical leadership and mission.

Thus when Pastor John speaks of keeping His commandments he is first and foremost speaking of believing in the name of His Son Jesus Christ. He then speaks of loving one another or remaining in the local assembly for the glory of God and the good of His people. And the idea of loving one another encompasses all of the other commandments for all of the other commandments found throughout the Bible are inside of this one commandment.

⁸ "Owe nothing to anyone except to love one another; for he who loves his neighbor has fulfilled the law. ⁹ For this, 'YOU SHALL NOT COMMIT ADULTERY, YOU SHALL NOT MURDER, YOU SHALL NOT STEAL, YOU SHALL NOT COVET,' and if **there is any other commandment, it is summed up in this saying, 'YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF.'** ¹⁰ Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfillment of the law" (Rom. 13:8-10).

¹³ "For you were called to freedom, brethren; only do not turn your freedom into an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another. ¹⁴ For **the whole Law is fulfilled in one word, in the statement, 'YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF.'** ¹⁵ But if you bite and devour one another, take care that you are not consumed by one another" (Gen. 5:13-15).

⁸ "**If, however, you are fulfilling the royal law according to the Scripture, 'YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF,'** you are doing well. ⁹ But if you show partiality, you are committing sin and are convicted by the law as transgressors" (James 2:8, 9).

Thus for Pastor John and the writers of the New Testament to love God is to love Jesus [or vice versa] and when you love God you will love one another [or the church].

Although Pastor John draws a tight net of application as it relates to the local assembly, Jesus casts a much broader application in Luke 10:39 when asked the question, "Who is my neighbor?" Pastor John also speaks to this when he says love meets the needs of those with need, "But whoever has the world's goods, and **sees his brother in need** and closes his heart against him, how does the love of God abide in him?" (1 John 3:17).

The Apostle Paul blends these two ideas together in Galatians 6:10.

"So then, while we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, and especially to those who are of the household of the faith" (Gal. 6:10).

Thus in 1 John Pastor John uses the idea of commandments in several ways.

First, he uses commandments broadly to speak of all acts of obedience that are descriptive of Life in Christ (1 John 2:3, 4). However, this could be referring to the idea presented in 1 John 3:2-24.

Second, he uses commandment to speak of the singular commandment to love one another (1 John 2:7-8; 4:21 [under the one commandment are two actions. One is causal and the other is consequential]).

Third, he will use commandments to describe the two commandments are the one commandment to believe in Jesus and to love one another (1 John 3:22-24).

Fourth, if the keeping of His commandments are understood in the preceding discussion, then the commandments are not burdensome (1 John 5:2, 3).

Fifth, because keeping His commandments is to believe in the name of His Son Jesus Christ, one is not saved who does not keep His commandment. Thus to keep His commandments is to continue in the confession.

For Pastor John the issue of continuing in faith or the confession is vital. Everything hinges on this singular idea. No one can say they are a confessor if they do not continue in the confession. The continuation does not create the confession. Confessing oneself a sinner and Jesus as their Savior births a continuation in and commitment to the local church.

Why is this idea so important to a study of 1 John? The occasion for the Letter was a denial on the part of some concerning their own sin and thus culpability and their need for a Savior and in specific the testimony circulated concerning what was said about Jesus. Their rejection of these two tenants separated them from the testimony and gathering of the local assembly of confessors/believers.

Those who rejected what was said concerning Jesus were either removed through Church Discipline or they left the assembly voluntarily. Either way they developed a disdain for the assembly they once attended. Their failure to continue in the confession and the assembly were indications they were never true confessors to begin with (1 John 2:18, 19).

Such people are not keeping His commandments and as a result are not saved. Yet Pastor John seeks to celebrate the love of God for His people, in His people and through His people. For Pastor John loving one another loves God. One cannot love the head without loving the body. So today, right now let us celebrate the love of God by loving one another.

ENDNOTES

¹ <http://marccortez.com/2010/11/22/calvin-on-the-church-as-the-mother-of-believers-ets-paper/>

Studies in 1 John

9 of 11

Often in our discussion of “commandment keeping” we lean toward thoughts of obedience. In such a discussion commandment keeping and obedience become very much man-centered. We define our obedience by what we do and often it is a means of earning or meriting God’s favor and blessing. Although the idea of commandment keeping or obedience is rather large, we will consider the idea only as it is found in 1 John. In this short study we will see how commandment keeping and loving one’s brother and continuing in the local assembly because one believes God’s record are inseparably linked.

The keeping of His commandments is often tied directly into the perseverance of the saints. Those who persevere are saved. A theological dilemma exists because we see commandment keeping as optional rather than as a fruit of believing. If you do not keep His commandments, you do not believe in Jesus. Yet believing in Jesus causes commandment keeping. In 1 John they are inseparably linked. Those who do not keep His commandments are lost.

It is my own perspective that he did not mean anything other than a localized gathering that was geographically defined. His loving the brethren was not abstract or indefinable. His idea of the church universal was represented by local churches and not individual Christians apart from local churches. For Pastor John the church universal was made up of churches local.

No individual in the early church would claim to be the church. Every Christian is a part of the church, but they are not the church. The church exists in the community of the gathered.

WAUKESHA BIBLE CHURCH



CHRIST-EXALTING · WORD-CENTERED · GRACE-BASED · GLOBAL-IMPACTING

Waukesha Bible Church (262) 542-7177
www.waukeshabible.org