

Jennifer and I went rock climbing a couple months ago for just my second time ever. My first time was fun and this time was too. The first thirty minutes were spent in training. You don't just arrive and jump on the wall. There are terms for safe climbing. There's also getting acquainted with the equipment. I had to learn to trust a rope and clip for my safety. Once I did that it would change how I climbed.

In rock climbing there's the jargon and the equipment. These are what you trust in to safely allow you to scale a wall and come down. In life people like to say "it's all about faith." Faith will allow you to safely navigate life and get through to the other side. Many people feel you're only as strong as your faith. How can you be sure your faith is strong enough to rely on to be saved? If everything comes down to just my faith and its strength then I guess I wish it were stronger.

Just believing is important, but believing alone doesn't bring about change in your life. I believe the roof can keep the rain out. But if there's a hole or a weak spot my belief is misplaced. The second lesson describes the proper relationship between believing, peace, and love on this Sunday after the resurrection...

Believing in Christ means peace in Christ
Changing how you love
Changing how you act

I'll be honest. I don't love rock climbing. I wouldn't have chosen to be on the wall, straining muscles I'd forgotten I even have, clinging for dear life to these grips way too small for my hands. I did it because I love my wife. She wanted to go and I wanted to support her. That's what spouses do. Even when something isn't your favorite thing to do you participate because you love your spouse.

It's that kind of natural give and take that belief has with love. John describes, **"Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God, and everyone who loves the father loves his child as well."** If you believe that Jesus is the Christ then you'll love Christ. And because Christ was of the Father then you'll love the Father as well. Loving Christ becomes proof you're a child of God. And those that are children loved by God we want to love them too.

But how do you prefer to be loved? Maybe you like whispers in your ear. Maybe you like a nice weekend away or an evening at a quiet restaurant. Maybe it's roses or jewelry every once and while, or dishes that get put away or a house that gets cleaned. Or is it simply holding hands. Dr. Gary Chapman in his book, *The Five Love Languages*, names the five different ways people want to be loved. What's God's love language? Does he want words of affirmation or quality time? Is he more interested in gifts or acts of service? How should we love God? John answers that question, **"This is love for God: to obey his commands."** Loving God and keeping his commands go together. There's no mystery about how God wants to be loved. It's obedience.

Love as the world practices it is often a selfish thing. Love looks to get from others. It can't be love to look at pornography on the internet while your spouse wonders where you are. It can't be love to drink till drunk and then risk lives driving home. It can't be love to lock the kids down and not let them experience anything or let them have complete freedom with no supervision at all. These aren't love but sin.

Believing in Christ changes how we love because we get to see and believe in the most unselfish act of love ever. Jesus loved first and gave his life for your unloving sinful actions. He gave himself completely for people who wanted nothing to do with him. Christ loved God and loves us. He unselfishly rose from the dead and came to show himself to those who deserted him in the locked upper room. That's God's love for them, God's love for us in the resurrected Christ.

It changes how we love. The love of God for us in Christ stirs us to love God. Loving God means loving others as the outward sign we believe in Christ. Our love for others gives us a visible sign and assurance we still believe in Jesus. We've seen the forgiveness Christ won for us and in turn are led to love those around us. We're changed to love unconditionally as God loved us.

I think Jennifer knew I wasn't super excited about rock climbing. I think she saw the wincing and the grimaces. She had a clue when I was willing to pack it up early. Ultimately it's pretty hard to hide true feelings. If you don't like something you can pretend to smile but likely it's clear that you don't. Our inside feelings become how we act on the outside. No love in your heart means you won't act in loving ways. So when love is in your heart because of the Risen Christ, Jesus will change how you act.

God's list of do's and don'ts sounds impossible. You know the basic commands. Do not murder and do not steal. Those are ones that don't even sound so hard. The truth is down deep we want nothing to do with any of God's commands naturally. They're a burden, a weight we have to carry. God says hold off living together before you're married and the sinful nature groans under the load of two rent payments and unfulfilled desires. God says quit swearing and using his name as the punch line of your conversations and the sinful nature hunches over because we're so used to saying God's name but for the wrong reasons. And God tells us that cheating in any way is wrong and our sinful nature cries out it's unfair. God wants us to be happy and sometimes cheating is the only way we can succeed and be happy.

Our sinful nature isn't naturally in line with God's commands. But it isn't God's commands that need changing, it's how we act. **"This is how we know that we love the children of God: by loving God and carrying out his commands."** Loving God and carrying out his commands go together. So if we claim to love God then we had better be changing the way we act. But that change doesn't come from within us. It comes from Jesus. Jesus didn't just rescue us from hell with his payment for sins. He rose on Easter to save us for something positive. Believing in Christ means peace with Christ and a change in how we act.

As we change how we act the commands don't necessarily get easier, our faith in Christ gets stronger. **"And his commands are not burdensome, for everyone born of God overcomes the world."** Overcoming the world didn't happen as our solo victory. It was Christ's solo victory. By faith in Christ Jesus we haven't just overcome the world, we've conquered it. We believe Christ came into this world to win the victory over sin, death, and the devil for us. His resurrection assures us of the victory. It's a victory that lasts not only for a moment. It goes on day after day. We rejoice in the hope and forgiveness Christ wins. We stay loyal in the face of Satan's attacks. We resist temptation. We use and enjoy the things of this world without becoming attached to them. We endure pain and hardship without despair or bitterness. And we look forward every day to rising from the dead to eternal life on the Last Day.

Dangling in the air 40 feet up there's a certain peace. Conversations below are quiet. The air above is silent. It really allows you to realize your life hangs by the rope. But the rope was strong, it held, I believed in its strength, and made it to the top. Once. Turns out the rope was much stronger than my forearms. You believe in something much stronger than rope. God's power in God's Word leads you to Christ Jesus as the object of your faith. Faith's power to save is in Jesus. Believing in him means overcoming the world. Overcoming the world leads to loving God. And loving him leads to loving others. Easter Sunday we were reminded of all that Jesus did for us in life, death, and resurrection. We'll never be able to live or love perfectly. But we already have a victory which changes how we love and act. It's a victory in Jesus.