

1 JOHN: DISCERNING TRUE FROM FALSE SPIRITUALITY
Part XIII: True Spirituality's Victory Over Burdensome Legalism
(1 John 5:3b-5)

I. Introduction

- A. False spirituality is often oppressive, a characteristic of the Pharisaism of Jesus' day, Matthew 23:4a. For this reason, Jesus in Matthew 11:28-30 called those who had been heavily laden by the legalism of the Pharisees to come unto Him for rest. (J. Dwight Pentecost, The Words and Works of Jesus Christ, 1991, p. 201-202)
- B. 1 John 5:3b-5 teaches how true spirituality is not oppressive legalism, and how one is freed from it:

II. True Spirituality's Victory Over Burdensome Legalism, 1 John 5:3b-5.

- A. After clarifying in 1 John 5:3a that the true love of God in a believer is seen in his heeding God's commands, John added in 1 John 5:3b KJV that those "commandments" of God "are not grievous."
- B. The Greek New Testament word behind the KJV word "grievous" here is *barus* (Arndt & Gingrich, A Grk.-Eng. Lex. of the N. T., 1967, p. 133-134), and its use here counters false legalism (as follows):
1. The term *barus* means "burdensome," Ibid., and it is used in Matthew 23:4 of the "heavy" burdens the Pharisees laid on others under the yoke of the Mosaic Law (Theol. Dict of the N. T., 1974, v. I, p. 557).
 2. Since *barus* is also used here in 1 John 5:3b to imply what false spirituality was like, Jesus' Matthew 23:4 critique of legalistic Pharisaism with its added, man-made, "burdensome" rules as critiqued in Matthew 15:8-9 reveals for us here in 1 John 5:3b that oppressive legalism is a form of false spirituality, Ibid.
- C. Since 1 John 5:4, begins with the Greek term, *hoti* that in this context carries the causal force to be rendered "because, since" (U. B. S. Grk. N. T., 1966, p. 823; Ibid., Arndt & Gingrich, p. 592-594), 1 John 5:4 explains how God's commandments are not legalistically burdensome as is taught in 1 John 5:3b (as follows):
1. The basis for victory over living under the yoke of burdensome legalism has already been provided for everyone who has permanently been born (*gegennemenon*, perfect passive participle of *gennao*, "to be born," The Analyt. Grk. Lex. (Zon.), 1972, p. 76, 79) of God. Thus, those who were regenerated by God's grace apart from human meritorious works (Ephesians 2:8-9 and the passive voice in *gegennemenon*) so that they are unconditionally eternally secure in their salvation produced by God (the perfect tense of *gegennemenon*) have the means of gaining victory over burdensome legalism in life, 1 John 5:4a.
 2. Those who have thus been permanently born of God are right now currently gaining victory (*nika*, present indicative of *nikao*, "overcome," Ibid., p. 277; Ibid., U. B. S. Grk. N. T.) over the world system "that is satanically blinded to the gospel (cf. 2 Cor. 4:3-4)," Bible Know. Com., N. T., p. 901; 1 John 5:4b.
 3. In so doing, John added that this is the victory that overcame the world system, even our faith as believers, 1 John 5:4c. That faith is expressed in believing that Jesus is the Son of God, 1 John 5:5; John 20:31.
 4. Accordingly, John "suggests that such faith is the secret of" the believer's "continuing victory and, for that reason, obedience to God's commands need not be burdensome," Ibid.
 5. We thus summarize John's teaching on gaining victory over oppressive, legalistic spirituality as follows:
 - a. True spirituality heeds God's commands, not the commands of man that are added in addition to and promoted over even God's commands in the form of legalism, cf. 1 John 5:3a with Matthew 15:8-9.
 - b. However, in heeding God's Biblical commands, a believer in true spirituality has the basis for heeding the Lord's commands already built into his positional victory produced when he believed Jesus was God's Son so as to be saved by God's grace in a standing of unconditional salvation security, 1 John 5:4.
 - c. That expression of faith sets the pattern for victory over artificial, legalistic spirituality in Christian living: just as one trusted in Christ to be saved, he is to keep trusting God to supply the motivation and the power he needs to heed God's Word in the Christian life. Thus, he finds that keeping those commands are not a burden since God is living Himself through the believer, Rom. 8:3-4; Phil. 2:12-13; Gal. 2:20.

Lesson: (1) *The artificial spirituality of legalism is burdensome (a) since one who practices it tries by futile human effort (b) to keep not only God's commands, (c) but also man's added, extrabiblical rules. (2) Conversely, true spirituality is based upon one's position in Christ's salvation in grace (a) so that one relies by faith on God (b) to supply the motivation and the power to heed God's commands [not man's added rules], (c) making the keeping of those commands of the Lord not at all burdensome.*

Application: *May we ABANDON human effort to try keeping God's commands and man's added rules in order to RELY on the Holy Spirit for the motivation and power always to heed just God's commands, and so live by grace.*