1 John 3:23 This then is his command: that we believe in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ, and that we love one another just as he commanded us.

It’s an age old problem that we humans have. That old problem that is summed up by the saying: “Do what I say, not what I do!” Just think of how many circumstances are really covered by that saying. The parent who uses bad language but tells their children they can’t. The adult that got $20 in change too much and keeps it and yet they tell their kids, “Don’t steal.” We as adults get angry and yell and fuss and yet we tell our children that such behavior is not appropriate for them. Again, I think you can see that the circumstances covered here are pretty vast.

For us as Christians it is especially an interesting battle. You can see that the battler has been going on a long time as you just look at the very first verse of the Epistle reading before us. **“Dear children, let us love not only with word or with our tongue, but also in action and truth.”** Every one of us knows that passage and numerous others is telling us that our faith is not just what we say, not just a “one hour on Sunday thing” but rather is to be a way of life. Our whole life, every aspect of our life is to be conducted in accord with the Word and truth of our Lord and Savior. So we tell our kids, “Jesus is important” but do they actually see that in your life? God’s Word is supreme but your Bible has more dust on it than anything else. Yep, this idea, this insistence of God that we not only believe but live that faith and believe is a difficult and rather troublesome part of our lives. That’s not a guess, it is a reality.

The Apostle John understood the struggle and we are grateful that the Holy Spirit moved him to address that struggle in his Epistle. Yes, John’s first epistle is really an encouragement to sanctification. It is a work reminding us that because of Jesus our attitude, our ideas, our goal is to live a life that is according to God’s Word and revealed truth. It is the call as God’s children that we hate sin and desire lives pleasing to God in every way. But what a struggle that is. Our theme for today will be: **BELIEVE IN JESUS.**

After that opening encouragement to live our lives in accord with God’s Word how interesting to see how the struggle we have is presented. Take a look at verse 19: **“This is how we know that we are of the truth and how we will set our heats at rest in his presence:”** Do you grasp the point of that sentence? How do we know we are believers? How do we know we are children of God and heirs of eternal life? How do we know that the promises and wonders of God are to be applied to us? It is the next verses that help us explore the answer that God has given. But please note that the answers can be difficult to wrestle with.

Verse 20 provides the first part of how we know. **“If our hearts condemn us, God is greater than our hearts, and he knows everything.”** Here is a truth that we don’t like to contemplate. It is really the truth that we are sinners, lost and condemned creatures before the righteous and Holy God. Do you feel the sting of your sins, the shame of your faults, and the disgrace of disobedience to the very precise and revealed Law of God? You should. The whole point of God’s law is, as Romans declares, the revelation of sin. Chapter 3:19-20, **“Now we know that whatever the law says is addressed to those who are under the law, so that every mouth will be silenced and the whole world will be subject to God’s judgment. For this reason, no one will be declared righteous in his sight by works of the law, for through the law we become aware of sin.”**

There it is. Can you study the Law as summarized by the Ten Commandments and walk away thinking you have no problem? Then you have not studied the Law. We sin in thought, word and deed. As God’s children we strive to not let any sin become our master but the truth is that sin seems to always get the upper hand as we go about our lives. We hit our thumb with that hammer we are using and it is not just a cry of pain we utter but a curse and often a misuse of God’s Holy name. The fact is, **“there is no one righteous, not even one,”** and **“all our righteous acts are filthy rags.”** When we look at the Law, that law condemns us, crushes us, and shames us because of the evil we know is in our lives and hearts.

But please don’t overlook the importance of our being told, **“God is greater than our hearts, and he knows everything.”** It is good that we grasp the nature of our sins but it is even better that we have a God who knows everything in every way, including the very depths of our heart. God knows the difference between a sin that is the result of our struggle as his children that we have failed in and the sin that we persist in because we have rejected his Majesty and authority as God. One is the struggle of faith and the other is the chasing after unbelief. You cannot hide from God the reality of sin in your life and as a child of God you will also know that reality of sin.

Then comes verse 21. **“Dear friends, if our hearts do not condemn us, we have confidence before God.”** Here is a truth of our lives of faith. We do manage to actually follow and appear to obey God. We do manage with the help of the Holy Spirit to imitate Jesus, to walk as he walked and to love as He has loved us. We do manage to let our lights shine and the glory and honor of God is displayed in our lives. Now, don’t get to uppity here, because in fact God is a 1 million watt light bulb and we are at our best but little 4 watt bulbs. And yet, because of God’s grace and goodness we can shine and we can bring glory and honor to our Lord and God. And how awesome we feel at that.

Personally I not only feel good and at peace in my conscience but I also feel humbled and thankful to the Lord, I hope you are the same. That he should allow me, sinner that I am, to be his servant, to share his wonder, and to simply get something right here and there! I am not trying to diminish the confidence we have before God because of our deeds before Him and yet at the same time I don’t ever want to forget that those deeds are there only because of Him. Because we keep his commands. Keep his commands in Jesus. Counted as keeping his commands because of Jesus. Filled with good works to the glory of God because Jesus forgives our sins and in that forgiveness our works become his joy. It is always and only God in Jesus that counts.

And that gets me to the real point of what I think is important in this text. It is truly understanding the command of God. What is God’s command to us? Is it to be holy and pure, something we as sinful humans cannot do? Is it to decide that since we so love God our works must count before God as obedience and purity? No. the command of God is made clear here: verse 23, **“This then is his command: that we believe in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ.”**

That means something very specific. If we look in our Catechism under the Second Commandment, the question is asked: What is God’s name. The answer given is important and twofold. “1st. God’s name is every expression that God uses to refer to himself. 2nd. God’s name is everything God has revealed to us about himself in his Word.” I don’t know how to break this to you, but that doesn’t leave any wiggle room.

The Bible declares that Jesus is God’s Son, fully God revealed in human form and absolutely proven by his resurrection from the dead and ascension into heaven. If your Jesus is anything less than the almighty, all-knowing, present everywhere God and Lord of the entire universe then you do not believe in the name of Jesus.

If you have decided that Jesus is not the “atoning sacrifice” for our sins, that he did not die on the cross to pay our penalty for sin and that he did not actually and physically rise from the dead to be seated at God’s right hand to rule over all things for his eternal good and purpose, you do not believe in the name of Jesus, God’s Son.

If you have decided that God’s Word, which carries behind it the majesty, marvel and wonder of the authority and truth of Jesus, is merely a religious book written by pious men to advance their own careers then you do not believe in the name of Jesus. If you do not believe in the Bible as God’s truthful Word and you think you can make it say whatever you want instead of what God clearly and miraculously revealed, you do not believe in Jesus. You cannot slash and dash God’s Word without slashing and dashing Jesus!

God’s command is that we believe in his Son, Jesus Christ. Born of the virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate. He was crucified for our sins. He was raised from the dead for our joy and salvation, and thus we can and do proclaim the forgiveness of sins and the gift of eternal life and salvation in Jesus. He ascended into heaven and He has been given all authority on Heaven and earth for all eternity. This same Jesus will return and will judge every soul as either a believer in his name or not. And Jesus will, by virtue of his righteous justice and authority either grant you eternal life with him or eternal death in hell without him. That is what it means to believe in his name.

We believe and thus we live that belief. Thus the next words of this verse: **“And that we love one another just as he commanded us.”** We are to love. Not the shallow, lustful, sex driven love of the world, but the true love that God has displayed in history toward us through his promises and fulfillment of those promise in our Savior Jesus. It is the love of Jesus that we are told lead him to “joyfully” go to the cross to save our very souls. He laid down his life for us even though scorned, rejected and mocked by his very own people, the ones he healed and loved. God was so committed to us, that’s how I like to define God’s love, “committed to us,” God was so committed to us that though the entire history of the world is one rebellion after another against Him God still carried out his plan for us. We have a Savior, a Savior who has taught us to love.

We love by treating our neighbor with justice, love and compassion. We love by showing a willingness to stop the hurtful, harmful words and actions that we sometimes engage in because we let sin rule in our lives. We love by being humble, careful, conscientious and committed to God’s truth and Word. We are not out to Lord it over anyone but we are here to remind you that you have Lord who is over you! We guide in Jesus. We see the world and understand it ways in Jesus. We trust in Jesus to be our help, guide and stay in everything. We love because Jesus has so loved us!

It is our faith in Jesus, our love in Jesus that binds and connects us to Jesus. It is what Jesus has given us. And then note the last line of verse 24: **“This is how we know that he remains in us: We know it from the Spirit, who he has given us.”**

The Spirit that God has given. The Spirit we are told testifies to Jesus and His truth. The Spirit gives us life, true life and salvation. The Spirit calls us to be God’s children and heirs of eternal life. The Spirit leads us to trust his Word, cling to God’s promises, rejoice in the victory of Jesus and grasp the new life we find in Jesus, yes, that life of love in Jesus. The Holy Spirit uses God’s law to convict us of sin and then to turn to Jesus for the forgiveness of sins and new life Jesus gives. And there we are. In one little paragraph, one little section of verses, brought full circle to the wonder of what God has done and does for us in Jesus and the Holy Spirit the Father and Jesus send.

I find the words before us both disturbing and uplifting. I know my sins as convicted by the Law. I know my Savior as revealed and proclaimed in the Gospel. And I know the calling of God to believe in his Son, our Savior Jesus. That is the heart of everything. Amen.