

Really Loving God!
1 John 4:20-5:3a

He who loves God must love his brother also (1 John 4:21).

As a father protecting his little children, John warns his friends that the false teachers who have left their assemblies will steal the greatest joy any believer will ever know—the joy of life in the family of God. The theme of First John is *fellowship*—that experience of intimacy with Christ and His people only available to those who belong to Him. The passion of John is, “don’t lose it by listening to these lying teachers. True joy is based on apostolic truth and is only possible in fellowship with God” (1:1-4).

This joy of fellowship is only for those who abide in Christ by keeping His word—especially His foremost commandment to love one another (1:5-2:27). In his extended discourse on the confidence of the believer at Christ’s coming (2:28-4:19) John exhorts his readers to abide in Him by loving God and their fellow Christians with the pure love of God and promised that the maturity of this love would be a key source of confidence on that Day. In the final segment of his epistle, he applies all he has said about love to the everyday life of every Christian.

Without apologizing for his demanding teaching on the absolute necessity of loving our fellow Christians, the Apostle dedicates three paragraphs to removing every excuse believers offer for not loving one another with the love of Christ (4:20-5:17):

- Love every believer in Christ: If they confess Christ, they are your brother or sister—*love them because they are His children!* (4:20-5:3a)
- Love with the power you have already received: If you believed in Christ, you have the power to love—*love them because you can!* (5:3b-5:15)
- Love until God takes them home: If they are sinning, God will decide when to take them out—*love them to save their lives!* (5:16-17)

A common defense from a Christian who is resisting the message of First John because he or she feels guilty for their unloving attitudes and actions toward another believers is to claim, “Well, at least I love God!” No they don’t. It is impossible to be loving God and hating a fellow Christian at the same time:

Christians who truly love God do not offer _____ for not loving His children!

Any believer who claims love for God while harboring lovelessness toward a fellow Christian is lying. But there is a way to know for sure if a Christian truly loves God.

- I. Christians who love God will love His children—*all* of them and *each* of them (1 John 4:20-5:1).
 - A. Christians who say they love God should love His children—those who believe in Jesus (4:20-5:1).
 1. Bold, absolute statement: Any Christian who claims to love God while hating his fellow Christian is a liar (4:20a).
 2. *Reason* why this is a false claim: Love for the unseen God will find expression in love for our brethren (4:20b; 3:17-19). Practical insight: True love is an up-close type of love. It doesn’t abandon the relationship when intimacy reveals faults and shortcomings.
 3. *Reason* why this is a false claim: Love for God always involves keeping His commandments (John 14:19-21, 23), especially Christ’s foremost command to love one another (John 14:15; 13:34-35) (4:21). Textual insight: “We have this commandment” is a blending of two commandments that cannot be separated or both are broken—*love God; love your brother also*.
 4. *Reason* why this is a false claim: Everyone who confesses to believe that Jesus is the Christ (the Anointed One whom God promised to provide as a substitute sacrifice for the sins of the world) should be loved as a child of God (5:1; John 1:12).

Background insight: A “proverb” in Israel at that time said this about loving a father and his children: “Everyone who loves the father also loves the children fathered by him.”

- B. First John’s demand to love one another intensifies as John removes our excuses not to love!
1. The “super-spiritual” excuse: “Well, at least I love God!” No you don’t! You cannot love Him and disregard His commandment to love one another!
 2. The “Jewish lawyer” excuse (Luke 11:27-29, “And, who is my neighbor?”): “I don’t need to love him or her! The way they behave, the way they have hurt me, he or she could not possibly be a Christian!” No picking and choosing! Our brothers and sisters are those who believe that Jesus is the Christ. So, don’t ask, “Who is my brother or sister?” to define your responsibility away. The Word of God plainly tells you who the children of God are—believers in the Christ!

II. Those who keep His commandments (guard or love His guidance) truly love God (1 John 5:2-3a).

- A. Genuine love for God will result in obedience to His commandments (5:2-3a).
1. Summary Restatement: Loving His children=loving Him=keeping His commandments (5:2).
 2. Climax: Any believer can know who truly loves God—those who keep His commandments (5:3a).
- B. First John’s offer to enjoy fellowship with God in the church and at His coming will only be experienced by those who truly love Him!
1. Are you close to someone who claims to love God but is holding a grudge, refusing to forgive, or gossips about a fellow Christian? What is God asking you to say to them?
 2. Are you wondering why you are not experiencing the joy of fellowship? Is your love for God waning through disobedience when it comes to loving a fellow Christian? What is God saying to you today?

Break the chain of hatred in your marriage, your family, your church, and your world—write out a specific plan of action for loving the most unlovely child of God in your life today.

Confess—Father, I agree with your condemnation of my excuses for not loving _____.

Claim—Father, I know you have given me the power to love _____.

Commit—Father, I expect you to give me opportunity to love _____ and tell you now that when these opportunities arrive, I will do what you say.