



The Epistle of 1 John

“HOW DO WE KNOW WE LOVE GOD?”

1 John 4:20-5:3

Theme: We know that we love God when we love others in the same way He loves us.

I. Meeting the Condition of Loving One Another – 4:20

A. THE MERIT OF ONE’S PROFESSION OF LOVE

1. In the previous section, John had just described the fact that believers *“love, because He first loved us.”*
2. As we respond to His love by loving, God’s love reproduces itself in us. But the question asked is “to whom does this love go?”
3. Some would say that it goes toward the One who loved us ... and that although our love ultimately goes toward Him, that it will first express itself to that which can be seen before it ever is expressed to that which is unseen.
4. We’re told that there is a test of the genuineness of our profession of love to see whether it is an empty profession or whether there is merit to it: *“If someone says, ‘I love God,’ and hates his brother, he is a liar.”*
5. It is interesting that the word chosen by God’s Spirit is that the person who offers a faulty profession is not just “wrong” about his profession, but knows he is wrong and *“is a liar.”*

B. THE MARGINS OF ONE’S PROFESSION OF LOVE

1. God then qualifies the issue by explaining the logic behind His diagnosis of a false profession: *“for the one who does not love his brother whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen.”*

The Epistle of 1 John

2. God is teaching us here that He cannot possibly be to me the object of the kind of love with which He first loved me since there is no imperfection in Him that my love can overcome.
3. Remember that the love of God for me is demonstrated in the midst of my imperfection and sin ... that's what makes it so miraculous – it was not based on merit or loveliness, but on the power of love itself – cp. *Ezekiel 16:5-6; Romans 5:8*
4. Hence, my love must go out to those whom I see, as God saw me when He first loved me.
5. It must be what His love is – “no idle sentiment or barren sympathy, but a love that seeks them, and bears long with them, and knocks, and waits, and longs, and prays, for their salvation.”¹
6. You may say: “But I can’t!” – Do I not try my loving Father’s patience far more than any brother or sister can ever try mine? – cp. *Luke 6:34-35*
7. This is what makes it demonstrably the love of God in us!

II. Obeying the Command of Christ to Love One Another - 4:21

A. THE MEANING OF THE COMMANDMENT

1. John then reminds us of the commandment of Christ: *“And this commandment we have from Him, that the one who loves God should love his brother also.”*
2. The commandments of Christ are identified by Him as the prescribed way by which our love to Him can be manifest.

¹ Candlish, p. 336.

The Epistle of 1 John

3. The best way to respond to God's love is to be obedient to His commands generally – cp. ***John 14:15***
4. Specifically, it is through the command to love one another: ***“that the one who loves God should love his brother also.”***
5. Thus, one of the best ways to express your love to God is to love one another.

B. THE MOTIVE FOR THE COMMANDMENT

1. Notice the motivation for loving one another – ***“the one who loves God ...”***
2. Notice that we do not love our brother in order to receive love from God ... as a form of earning the right to be loved.
3. Rather, we love one another because we have received the Holy Spirit of God and know the transforming power of the love of God that ***“abides in us”*** – cp. ***v. 16***
4. God then states that ***“to the extent that you did it to one of these ... you did it to me.”*** – ***Matthew 25:37-40.***

III. Displaying the Commitment to Christ by Loving One Another – ***5:1-3***

A. THE ESTABLISHMENT OF OUR COMMITMENT TO CHRIST – ***v. 1***

1. Again, it is necessary to reiterate that loving one another does not produce love from God toward us
2. Rather, it is the result of God's love already abiding in us through the establishment of a relationship with Him by faith.

The Epistle of 1 John

3. This is why John comes back and says: *“Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God, and whoever loves the Father loves the child born of Him.”*
4. God is not interested in a professed love that results in no proof of that love – it’s easy to sing praises, pray prayers, give money, attend church, serve in some ministry program, and find expressions of one’s *professed* love for God.
5. God says: “If you love me as I choose to be loved, you must love me as a Father who begets offspring – the only sure proof of your loving me is your loving him who is begotten of me.”
6. Not only do we love the Son of God, but we also love those who are made in the likeness of the Son of God – believers – since He is the first-born among many brothers.

B. THE EVIDENCE OF OUR COMMITMENT TO CHRIST – vv. 2-3

1. *“By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and observe His commandments.”*
2. When you love your brothers in the midst of their imperfections and sin, misery and unloveliness, you know that you love God and are keeping His commandments.
3. God then equates our love for Him with keeping His commandments: *“For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments.”*
4. But then He puts teeth in the notion that our keeping the commandments is the premier way to express love to God – when we are doing more than cooperating through obedience, but that we honor God in our obedience – *“... and His commandments are not burdensome.”*

The Epistle of 1 John

5. This is the triumph of love, reconciling our proud self-willed souls to dependence and submission to the authority of another – the one love.
6. It is the desire to dictate one's own direction that makes the commandments of another grievous – an illustration of despising God.
7. When you are committed to Christ, there is no friction between His commands and your own yieldedness.