

The Epistles of John

Week 37: 1 John 4:20-5:3

Somewhere along the line in Christian history, some have come to the conclusion that, since salvation is by grace through faith, then obeying God and keeping commandments must be an optional added extra. Our author would break out in a rash if anybody had said this to him

Ben Witherington III

1 John 4:20-5:3

1 John 4:20–5:3 (ESV)

20 If anyone says, “I love God,” and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen.

21 And this commandment we have from him: whoever loves God must also love his brother.

1 Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been born of God, and everyone who loves the Father loves whoever has been born of him.

2 By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and obey his commandments.

3 For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments. And his commandments are not burdensome.

1 John 4:20-5:3

Our vertical relationship with God is intricately connected with our horizontal relationship with each other.

This is why in the great commandment we are told that we should love [the] Lord our God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength —and what else? Our neighbor as ourselves. This is why we hear the petition in the Lord’s Prayer, “Forgive us our trespasses, Lord, as we forgive those who trespass against us.” The vertical relationship with God cannot be severed or cut off from the horizontal relationship with brothers and sisters. The one reflects the other; the one is connected to the other.

1 John 4:20-5:3

In 4:20 Liar refers not just to someone who says something which is not true, but also to a person whose actions contradict his words

Since God is the Father of the family and his very nature is love (“God is love,” 4:16), then it is one of the family traits for us to love God and our brothers if we are a part of the family of God.

In John’s worldview there is no place for separating our theological reflection from our personal or social ethics (behavior). If one has experienced divine grace, one’s life will reflect this in interactions with others.

For John, true faith always leads to love for God and others, and true love always results in obedience.

1 John 4:20-5:3

The key to Christian identity, John has been insisting, is love. The road to love, he will now affirm, is paved with faith.

The central implication is that true faith leads to a particular quality and depth of love. This is not a hit-and-miss phenomenon but a universal feature of faith: “everyone who believes” is affected by faith in this way. Believes what? Believes that Jesus is the Christ.

What John wishes to stress is that to believe is to have been acted upon in a dynamic, transformative way by God.

- It results, first, in love for God.
- It results, second, in love for other believers:

1 John 4:20-5:3

In 5:2-3 what commandments is John talking about?

Matt 22:34-40 (ESV)

But when the Pharisees heard that he had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered together. And one of them, a lawyer, asked him a question to test him. “Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?” And he said to him, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets.”

1 John 4:20-5:3

Verse 3 is my favorite in this passage:

For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments. And his commandments are not burdensome.

Jesus does not weigh down his people with meaningless laws that do not affect the heart. He gives commands that reveal to us the heart of God and direct our hearts to God. Jesus offers us an easy yoke and a light burden:

“Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light” (Matt 11:28–30).

Application for This Week

We have two applications this week:

If we believe, then we will Love God and Love believers, because this is God's nature and his family

Because we are born of God, keeping his commandments is ***not*** burdensome: that we Love God and Love believers. We have to ask: Is the Christianity we see in the world today based on these two commandments, or is it based on sets of rules that we must do and must not do?

Homework

My blog with past lessons is:

www.UnapologeticallyJohn.com

Thank you for coming!

See you back next week