

walks in the darkness, and does not know where he is going because the darkness has blinded his eyes. (1Jn 2:9, 11)

Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer; and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him. (1Jn 3:15)

As noted earlier, John is no doubt basing this teaching upon the very words of Yeshua:

A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another. (Jn 13:34–35)

...for the one who does not love his brother whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen. In our verse, we find the fourth time John has used the word “liar” (ψεῦστης, *pseustēs*) in this epistle (the word is previously used in 1:10; 2:4, 22). He will use it one more time in chapter five (v. 10). When John uses such strong language, describing as a “liar” the one who confesses to love God but hates his brother, he is not engaging in hate speech, but is simply stating the “blunt application of the law of non-contradiction.”¹ And his commonsense logic is this, as Yarbrough explains:

God is infinitely remote; Christians are all around, and our help can touch them immediately, directly, and effectively. It is therefore pure self-delusion to view love for God (who is far away) as fulfilled when love for others (who are nearby) is lacking.²

In John’s Gospel, the fact that God is invisible is repeated a number of times:

No one has seen God at any time; the only begotten God who is in the bosom of the Father, He has explained Him. (Jn 1:18)

1 Yarbrough, *1John*, p. 265.

2 Ibid. Yarbrough is not denying the omnipresence of God when he writes that “God is infinitely remote.” He is simply expressing that fact that only those who truly believe in Him, in His Son Yeshua, and thereby have the abiding Ruach with them and in them, know and experience the closeness of God. To the unbeliever, however, God (if they even think God exists) is hidden and thus far removed from reality.

And the Father who sent Me, He has testified of Me. You have neither heard His voice at any time nor seen His form. (Jn 5:37)

Not that anyone has seen the Father, except the One who is from God; He has seen the Father. (Jn 6:46)

Thus, when in our verse, John speaks of “God Who is not seen,” he is specifically referring to the Father. In a very real sense, however, the Father has revealed Himself in and by the creation, and therefore those who deny Him are without excuse (Rom 1:20). And another way He makes Himself known is through the lives of His people. Since He created mankind in His image, as believers express the love He has given them by loving each other, He is made known through their acts of obedience and their righteous ways. It is not merely through outward acts of devotion to God, as in participating in religious ceremony, attendance at times of worship, or even one’s verbal confessions that are sure marks of genuine faith, for all of these can be mere outward and empty acts of show, devoid of any true sanctifying faith. Yeshua Himself warned against outward acts of piety, such as praying in public, but which gave no credence to helping widows.

Beware of the scribes who like to walk around in long robes, and like respectful greetings in the market places, and chief seats in the synagogues and places of honor at banquets, who devour widows’ houses, and for appearance’s sake offer long prayers; these will receive greater condemnation. (Mk 12:38–40)

But when we love each other, and do so for the sake of the other and not with a goal to gain something for ourselves, then the very image of the invisible God is manifest in our lives. As Calvin notes:

But John meant another thing; he meant to shew how fallacious is the boast of every one who says that he loves God, and yet loves not God’s image which is before his eyes.¹

Indeed, the fact that all mankind is created in God’s image is the basis for the sanctity of life. Every life is sacred because all human beings have been created in the image of God. This reality forms the basis for the murderer to receive capital punishment.

¹ Calvin, *1John*, p. 249.

Whoever sheds man's blood, by man his blood shall be shed,
for in the image of God He made man. (Gen 9:6)

If we are to view every person as bearing the very image of the God we confess to love, then how much more ought we to love those who are our brothers and sisters in the Lord, who not only bear the image of their Creator but also are one together with us in God's family.

This love, which we are to have for our brothers and sisters in the Lord, does not in any way negate what might be described as "tough love," that is, a love that seeks to rescue someone from error. In fact, a sense of obligation to exhort, admonish, and even confront, when done so in wisdom and by the prompting of the Ruach, may be one of the most significant expressions of the kind of love we are to have for one another. Yet it is not our place to judge the hearts of others. Rather, the acts or deeds of the one who professes to love God are what give notice of the reality of one's true character.

21 And this commandment we have from Him, that the one who loves God should love his brother also.

John concludes with a reminder that loving one's brother is not an option. It is a commandment from God Himself. Does a person therefore confess to love God? If so, the obvious conclusion is that if that person is speaking the truth, he or she will strive to show their love by obeying what God has commanded. Once again, John is summarizing what he has taught in the previous chapters.

This is His commandment, that we believe in the name of His Son Yeshua Messiah, and love one another, just as He commanded us. (1Jn 3:23)

Who is the One Who has given us this commandment? John writes "we have this commandment from Him." Is this commandment from the Father and the Son? The obvious answer is "yes," for the very One Whom Moses, Aaron, Nadab, Abihu, and the 70 elders saw on Mt. Sinai (Ex 24:10) was Yeshua, and it was then that Moses received the Ten Words. Moreover, Yeshua reiterated the commandments of the Torah when asked by the lawyer regarding the greatest commandment in the Torah.

“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 foremost commandment. The second is like it, ‘YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF.’ On these two commandments depend the whole Torah and the Prophets.” (Matt 22:36–40)

What does Yeshua mean when He states that “the second is like it”? It is “like it” because loving one’s neighbor as oneself means a willingness to give of oneself for the betterment of one’s neighbor, thus extending the love of God received in one’s own salvation to one’s brother or sister by loving them in a self-giving way. This parallels the very act of God by which He gave Himself, through sending His Son to redeem His people. It was through the promise and the Promised One that the love of God was fully demonstrated.

In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins. (1Jn 4:10)

As noted above, to love God means to give oneself to be His loyal and obedient covenant partner. It is therefore clear that we demonstrate our love for God by living in accordance with His commandments and honoring Him through our obedience to Him. All who are truly His children are enabled to do so through the abiding presence of His Ru-ach.

The one who keeps His commandments abides in Him, and He in him. We know by this that He abides in us, by the Spirit whom He has given us. (1Jn 3:24)

The consistent emphasis that John puts upon loving one another within the body of Messiah is presented, not as a means of gaining one’s position or status before God, but as the inevitable fruit of a changed life—the reality of a new heart that seeks to obey God out of love for what He has done for the believer through the work of His Son, Yeshua. This is an important topic for discussion among the wider so-called “Messianic Movement.” Our desire to walk in the ways of Torah while lifting up the glories of our Messiah Yeshua, must not set us against our Christian brothers and sisters who may be quite certain that our desire to live in the ways of the Torah are “wrong-headed.”

God is not honored by excoriating with our words those who differ

with us but who do confess Yeshua as their savior. While we must remain firm in the truth as we have it in Scriptures and not compromise the truth for the sake of so-called “unity,” we must nevertheless be willing and ready to show love to those who confess Yeshua to be their Lord and Savior, and who show the reality of that confession through obedience to Him. When we have the opportunity to interact with them; to express our understanding of the Scriptures in areas where we may disagree, we must still do so as motivated by the love of God which we have ourselves experienced. It is by such an expression of love that we will prove ourselves to be true disciples of Yeshua.

Chapter 5

COMMENTARY

As we begin chapter five of this epistle, we should not allow the chapter break necessarily to indicate a new theme or subject, i.e., a new section in the epistle. Clearly the opening verses of this chapter link closely with the previous context of chapter four, and the fact that the word “love” (in both its noun and verbal forms, ἀγάπη, ἀγαπάω, *agapē, agapaō*) is found five times in the first three verses of this chapter surely links it with John’s theme in the previous chapter in which he emphasizes that genuine love for God likewise results in love for one’s fellow believer.

Yet it is clear that in these opening verses of chapter five John is also focusing upon “saving faith,” the act of “believing” in the person and work of Yeshua that results in eternal salvation. In fact, when we look for the word-group πίστις/πιστεύω (“faith,” “to believe”) in this epistle, we find it primarily in chapter five (7x), with only three occurrences in the previous chapters (1x in ch. 3, and 2x in ch. 4). Yet in emphasizing saving faith and the life of faith which inevitably follows, rather than introducing a “new subject,” John once again is teaching us that “saving faith” and “love” are inextricably bound together, true faith always issuing in love, and love being the visible fruit of saving faith.

Further, we see once again John’s emphasis upon the fact that saving faith is not summed up in mere mental assent to what is true. While the truth about God and His way of salvation is surely at the heart of saving faith, that which is the fruit of such faith is love: love for God seen through obeying Him, and love for one’s fellow believer.

Thus we see in these verses that both faith in God and His Messiah, Yeshua, as well as love for other believers, is that which characterizes the true child of God. The opening verses of chapter five may thus be outlined along these lines: [1] right belief (5:1, 5); [2] righteousness or obedience to God’s commands (5:2–3); and [3] love for God and for other believers (5:1–3).¹ In fact, John may have organized the phrases of these verses in a chiasmic arrangement to help stress this very truth, that faith and love are always combined.

1 Atkin, *1John*, p. 188.

A¹ Whoever believes that Yeshua is the Messiah (5:1a)

B¹ is born of God (5:1b)

C¹ loves those born of the Father. (5:1c)

D¹ this is the love of God that we keep His commandments (5:3a)

D² His commandments are not burdensome (5:3b)

C² loves the children of God (5:2)

B² everyone born of God (5:4)

A² the one who believes that Yeshua is the Son of God (5:5)

If the center of the chiasm (C¹+D¹/D²+ C²) is the focal point (as is often the case in this type of literary construction), then John is emphasizing that love for God and for each other is at the center of a genuine life of faith in Messiah Yeshua, and that such love, both for God and for one's fellow believers, is the fruit of obeying God's commandments.

1 Whoever believes that Yeshua is the Messiah is born of God, and whoever loves the Father loves the child born of Him.

Whoever believes that Yeshua is the Messiah – John is reiterating what he has emphasized throughout this epistle, that accepting by faith that Yeshua is the promised Messiah of the prophets and that being the Son of God, He alone is able to effect eternal atonement for sin is the only possible way for a sinner to stand righteous before God and to be received by Him into eternal life.

Who is the liar but the one who denies that Yeshua is the Messiah? This is the antichrist, the one who denies the Father and the Son. (1Jn 2:22)

By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Yeshua Messiah has come in the flesh is from God; (1Jn 4:2)

We have seen and testify that the Father has sent the Son to be the Savior of the world. Whoever confesses that Yeshua is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God. (1Jn 4:14–15)

Indeed, this central truth, that Yeshua is the Messiah, the Son of God, and the reality of His incarnation, that He came "in the flesh," is where John begins this epistle, for he testifies as an eyewitness of Yeshua, of His words, His miracles, His death, and His resurrection.

What was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched