

Reading: 1 John 4:13-5:1

Theme: Loving Our Brothers and Sisters in Christ.

We have noted from v19 that God has loved us and stamped divine love upon our souls – love to God, love to other believers and love to a lost world. We opened up on this last time and in doing so we noted it is a bridge to 4:20-5:1. The love stamped upon our souls has to be shown to our brothers and sisters in Christ. This is what John writes of and opens up on in v20-21 and again mentions in 5:1. I'm going to do an overview of these 3 verses this evening, but revisit 5:1 next time. I have 3 headings to look at these verses:

1. Sanctified Sense. (v20)

John, for the 7th time uses the introduction to, the formula for his reasoning “*If anyone says*” (1:6, 8, 10; 2:4; 6 & 9) - translated in NIV as “*If we claim*” (3x), “*The man who says*”, “*whoever claims*”, “*Anyone who claims*” and here as “*If anyone says*”. Each time John has used that approach he goes on to give a warning about pretending or claiming to be that which we are not. Sadly, we can be those who speak things to impress others, especially concerning our spirituality. We need to be careful not to do so, as we may be liars and deceive both ourselves and our hearers. God wants us to be real with ourselves, with one another and real with Him. It is good, right and proper as believers to share our encouragements with our brothers and sisters from the word of God – as we read it, hear it preached; as we have answers to prayer or from our wider Christian reading. We are to do this in a natural way as part of our fellowship together. We are to be spiritual in our natural lives and natural in our spiritual lives.

If we are a Christian, we ought to be confident towards God and have no fear of the Judgement Day because we love Him and are sure that He loves us. Due to this we find a love for brothers and sisters and should find they love us - so we can be confident towards them, being at ease with them, as they care for, accept us and we do not have to pretend to be that which we are not.

Here in v20 John is again blunt and says that if we say we love God and yet hate a brother or sister in Christ, then we are liars and our claim to love God is false. John has said this in a number of ways and a number of times already. It seems he recognised the need to drive home this reality and truth to the lives of those who could so easily excuse their attitudes and behaviour because they felt they were special or had superior knowledge or experiences (*which is the context of John's writing to these ones*).

John says that such claims are shown to be a lie because it just doesn't make sense – common or sanctified sense! Such ones claim to love God and have never seen Him, yet those they have seen and know, they have no time for, may even hate, despise and dismiss them as nothing. John uses the same word and tense for “seen” and it means *“has seen and kept on seeing since then”*.

People react to this and say things like *“Well it is easier to love God who is perfect than those around us who are not!”* They see other Christians with their faults and failings, even things that rub and grate and they do not like what they see. They then do not love as they should and seek to excuse it. We know God is perfect and there are no barriers, hindrances to our loving Him. John's argument here is reversed by some - *we can love*

God who we've not seen and cannot love our brothers and sisters who we have seen! We may be so content to feel that it is fine for us to just love God, to be concerned about loving and enjoying God and we feel that we are alright really.

Basically, John says in v20 “*Rubbish!*” Such ones may argue that they are keeping the greatest commandment to love God (Matthew 22:37-38) but Jesus immediately links this with the 2nd greatest commandment in v39 - to love our neighbour as ourselves. John is saying here that the evidence of loving God - as in the 1st command, is shown in our loving our brothers and sisters in Christ - as in the 2nd. If that love for brothers and sisters is absent, then we are liars as to our love for God, as our God wants from us that after love for Him, we are to love our neighbour as ourselves - it is both or nothing!

There is a sense in which we cannot love God without loving our brothers and sisters at the same time, for we are to love those who God loves. I know there is a vast difference, distinction theologically, intellectually and emotionally between loving God and loving our brothers and sisters, yet because of the response to the love of God in us (v19) “we love”. Yes, we love God, but it is impossible to love God and desire to please Him without loving our brothers and sisters in Christ.

John was writing to those been dismissed by those in error - who claimed to be great, who knew and experienced much and yet disdained other ‘*ordinary believers*’. They were very mystical - said great sounding words, spoke of such visions, experiences that mere Christians couldn’t understand and so they were special and had a really special love to and from God! John takes aim and fires with this verse – “Boom!” They are sunk. Their

words do not match their practice. It is a very practical verse - show your love to God by loving your fellow believers or you declare loud and clear that you are a liar!

There are many love poems around, cards with gushing overflowing sentimental expressions of love and yet they may be sent but not meant! Consider many of the great love poets as they professed undying love for this one – that was until the next ‘love’ comes along! Love is more than sentiment, emotions or gushing feelings expressed in sweet poetic words. Love activates and motivates - to do and to seek the real good and well-being of a person and not merely pander and fawn over them; but works for the real good to help and benefit that one. We have the privilege of constantly seeing our brothers and sisters and we are to love them. If we cannot do that, how can we honestly say we love God whom we have not seen.

John says and puts it bluntly in an appeal to Sanctified Sense, that if no one has seen God how can we really claim to love Him - for we have not seen Him with our naked eyes? It is a help to be able to see the object that calls forth our love – not essential, but a help. Yes, I know Christians are a pain at times, we can see their faults and failings, but we are also to see the grace of God in them and recognise that they are miracles of God’s grace and we are to love them as God’s children. In fact, we see it is commanded:

2. Summarised Commands. (v21)

If we love God, love the Lords Jesus, then we will do what He wants, especially what He has commanded us to do. John summarises principles and commands here in this verse. He gives us no opt out clause, no loopholes for any believer. If we

are not really doing the easier - loving our brothers and sisters who we can see - how can we fool, delude ourselves that we are really doing the more difficult in loving God who we have not seen! John draws our attention to the fact that this love for others is what God has commanded since OT times – check out the cross references to the greatest and the next greatest commandment in Matthew 22 and you will see they are OT commands. The Lord Jesus restated this in John 13 and the NT picks up on this also. There are no escape clauses about these ones being nice or ‘our kind of people’!

We may wonder if it is ridiculous, even foolish to command someone to love! Surely, emotions and affections cannot be commanded. Yet true love is more than feeling or affections or instincts of an animal nature. We are to realise that as a Christian we are a new creation in Christ, we have divine love stamped on us and in us and as such we are to have a new outlook, a new and developing mindset and attitude. Our thoughts, attitudes and outlook are to be governed by the word of God and we are to look and react to all people, especially believers, through the filter and lens of what the Bible teaches.

The ones who may rub us up the wrong way, who are different from us, who may annoy and frustrate us, we are now to view them as loved by and precious to God our Father. We are now to view them with the same eyes and attitude of God. We are to love them for He loves them.

We are not to sit at home or at church with a ritual chant (*whether audible or just in our minds*) “*Must love, must love*” and work up our feelings. No matter our feelings towards a person, we are to treat them as a brother or sister in Christ, as

loved by God our Father and we are to act towards them as if they were the most lovable person we know! In fact, we are to react as God reacts to us! We are to love, not necessarily at 1st like, a fellow believer. Yet as the work of God goes on in us, we may find even our sentiments changing.

God has 1st loved us and v19 says “*we love*”. The divine love stamped love upon our souls and it laid upon us to grow the maturing fruit of the Spirit, the 1st part of which is love and love for even other believers in our church and not just some fine words and feelings about the love of God. John then goes on to drive home this argument even further in 5:1 as he writes of the:

3. Same Nature. (5:1)

There is a lot in this verse and we will pick up on it again next time but note here it is speaking of Christians - all those who believe that Jesus is the Christ, are born of God and have the same Father, the same nature and belong to the same family. This is the position of each and every Christian. We are all greatly honoured in Christ, are in a personal relationship with God. Realise what is true of us as an individual is also true of every other Christians in our church, in the Church worldwide - the same family and have the same Father, same Saviour, same new nature, same hopes, desires and eternal home.

If we love the same Father then we will love His children also. John in 5:1 is not only referring to love for the Lord Jesus as the only begotten of the Father but includes every child of God, all who have ever been born-again of God’s Spirit. In any family we will find variations, differences of opinions, characteristics and temperaments and possibly we would not choose friends with those characteristics, interests etc. but as family we belong

together and should love each other. The principle holds firm in the spiritual family – so much more varied, different and yet there is to be a God-given and commanded love for one another as members of the same heavenly family.

We may find another believer objectionable, awkward, difficult to get on with, but we are still to love them! We are not told to like them but love them. There will be things about people we do not like but we are to love them and want their real good in spite of that. We are to look at them and remind ourselves they are the children of God, of the same family and same nature as we are; they also are heirs of heaven and we will spend eternity together in our Father's home. It will be impossible to turn away from them, ignore them, dismiss them, cold shoulder them or slander them in heaven - so why would we think it is OK to do such now? It is wrong, it is a sin, a breaking of our God's commands and yet we can persist in doing so and even justify it to ourselves as we can so clearly see they have different thoughts or are different to us. We are to see such as a snare, deception and delusion of the devil as he aims to get in to spoil and prevent not only our fellowship with one another but also with our God and Saviour. We have seen earlier in this letter, that which hinders, spoils fellowship with other believers also hinders, spoils and affects our fellowship with God. We are to seek to enjoy and delight in fellowship with our God and this necessarily involves enjoying, delighting in and loving our brothers and sisters - ones of the same nature and family.

This loving our brothers and sisters is a most practical matter for it affects our fellowship with God and our witness to the world around us. It affects our evangelism - Jesus says in John 13:34 and follows this by v35. Why do we evangelise and tell

the gospel? It is so that people can be saved and be brought to know the love of God in Christ Jesus? Yes. Yet we are not to evangelise so that when people are saved, become our brothers and sisters in Christ, we can then have the liberty to bad mouth, slander, grieve, cut off, dismiss, cold shoulder or ignore them! Sadly, that is how some professing, even mature and well-read Christians, can treat other believers. If we ever find ourselves going down that path of thought - if not so bold or foolish in our public actions, then we are to pray for mercy to love as we should not be deceiving ourselves and be found to be liars before God.

John was dealing with real practicalities here. Ones that **we all** do well to personally examine our lives before God about and be willing and ready to be rid of any barriers or hindrances in our own hearts concerning loving our brothers and sisters who we have seen - starting with those in our own church here.

Our God and Saviour challenges us all. What am I going to do? What are you going to do? John the apostle of love, pulls no punches as he applies the need for us to not only love our God and Saviour, but also to love our brothers and sisters as an outworking of that love.