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A0449 -- Dec. 5, 2004 – 1 John 4:19–5:3a – How to Love

Last week, we looked at fear versus love in 1 John 4:18. We learned that unbelievers both fear and do not fear God at the same time. They fear God because their deeds are evil and they don't want them to be exposed to the God of light who they know very well exists (John 3:20). But, at the same time, they live as if God does not exist (Rom. 3:18). Therefore, all unbelievers are living a contradiction. They are rational, in that they fear God because their deeds are evil; but they are irrational to continue living as if there is no God. Therefore, they are both rational and irrational at the same time. In fact, God has designed the universe to work this way. Deny Me, don't believe in Me, and you will destroy your own mind and all rationality. Only Christianity does not slay reason on the altar of Chance.

Second, we learned that believers are supposed to both fear and not fear God at the same time. How is this not a contradiction? Because we are to fear God in the sense of being in awe of who and what God is—His essence. But we are not to fear God's sudden appearance and judgment. We can avoid fearing His sudden appearance at the Rapture and the judgment to follow if we are loving one another. John says perfect love, that is mature love, casts out fear. Therefore, a carnal believer, one who is not loving his fellow believer lives a contradiction just like the unbeliever. He is both rational and irrational at the same time. The only way to avoid living a contradiction is to be a Christian who is abiding (walking by the Spirit). Only the Christian who is walking by the Spirit, who is abiding in Christ and His word is not living a lie. Everyone else is living a lie and is destroying their mind.

Greek Text 4:19 hemeis agapomen auton, hoti autos protos egapesen hemas.

Translation 4:19 We love Him because He first loved us.

John has mentioned loving one another many times but here, for the first time John mentions loving God. Unfortunately, you cannot see this in the NIV or NASB because the Greek text underlying these translations (i.e., the Critical/Minority Text) omits the word **Him** (*hemeis agapomen ____*). The majority text reads **we love Him** (*hemeis agapomen*

auton), not simply **we love**. The omission is critical here because the test in verse 20 clearly has in mind loving God, not just loving. Notice v. 20 says **if someone says, “I love God,”** not merely **“I love.”** Behind the words of this verse John probably has in mind the Lord’s discourse in the Upper Room, John 14:21-24.

²¹ "He who has My commandments and keeps them is the one who loves Me; and he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and will disclose Myself to him." ²² Judas (not Iscariot) said to Him, "Lord, what then has happened that You are going to disclose Yourself to us and not to the world?" ²³ Jesus answered and said to him, "If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our abode with him. ²⁴ "He who does not love Me does not keep My words; and the word which you hear is not Mine, but the Father's who sent Me.

Love is both commanded in Scripture and is demonstrated by following the commandments. No one can love Jesus unless he follows Jesus’ commandments. There is no such thing as an emotional, ooshie gooshie love for Jesus. An emotional display of affection may be legitimate; there is nothing wrong with a legitimate display of affection. But a legitimate display of affection for God always follows doctrine. Emotions are always the caboose in Christianity. Doctrine is always the engine. Emotions should never lead, doctrine always leads. Emotions may follow but only out of right doctrine.

Here is how it works, according to Christ Himself. *First* comes knowledge of God’s commandments or doctrine. Knowledge comes first. Apart from knowledge, there cannot be any obedience to God’s commandments or love for God. *Second* comes obeying God’s commandments. Of course, one of those commandments is to love one another. But if we want to love God, we can only do that by obeying His commandments. Nothing else ever qualifies as loving God. What I find in my generation is an ignorance of knowledge of the Bible. This is not to say my generation is stupid, they are not stupid at all. But they have a lot of “learning” that never comes to “knowledge” or “wisdom.” Biblically, “learning” and “knowledge” are two different things. 2 Timothy 3:7 says that some are “always learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth.” “Learning” is a simple remembrance of things out of context, details that have no connection or usefulness (e.g., Trivial Pursuit, or we might call it “the pursuit of trivia”). Many people are pursuing trivia. This does not come to knowledge of the truth. So, if you are not very good at Trivial Pursuit, don’t worry, that’s nothing to be ashamed of. On the other hand, “knowledge” is an embrace of things in the context of God’s creation, it is general in nature, it is interconnected in a worldview, and it is composed of useful information. What my generation of Christians has done is a

lot of “learning” that never comes to “knowledge” They skip the doctrine and try to “love Jesus” through music combined with emotionalism. But the word of God says that there is no loving Jesus apart from following Jesus’ commands and there is no way you can know the commands of Jesus unless you study God’s Word. So, with my generation there has been a disconnect between the Bible and spirituality. My generation thinks you can love Jesus apart from Scripture. For my generation, the Bible has become just another book and Jesus, the idea of Jesus, is what we are supposed to love and worship. In reality, my generation has many Jesuses. This only follows from the fact that if we believe the Bible is just another human book, then we can each come up with our own concept of Jesus, put on our gold crosses and WWJD bracelets, show up at the right time, sing a few secular songs with so-called Christian lyrics, and then walk away thinking we have been spiritual. This could not be further from the truth. True spirituality always follows sound doctrine. So, if you want to be made perfect in love, then the way to do that is to follow Christ’s commandments. When we do, we can be said to love God. Everything else is just a smokescreen.

If we do love God, then something else can equally be said to be true: that our love for God is sourced in God’s love for us. God is love and all love has its source in God. If all love is sourced in God and unbelievers do not have a relationship with God, then can unbelievers really love? No. Oh, there may be some feelings, sure, but love is not just a feeling. This is why the Bible is so against two people being unequally yoked. The Bible is wholly against a believer marrying an unbeliever. One has the capacity to love and the other does not. It is simply impossible for an unbeliever to have true love for someone else because all genuine love is sourced in God; and until you have a connection to that God, a relationship with that God then you can just forget it.

Knowing the truth about “love,” let me make a few observations and applications from this truth. Let’s start with a common observation: Unbelievers have a very hard time making the commitment of marriage. Several observations demonstrate this observation: (1) Unbelievers often have long engagements demonstrating fear of commitment. No true love exists. (2) They often live together for years and years trying out the relationship before getting married. This is in violation of Divine Institution #2: Marriage and the principles of Proverbs 5. (3) They often live together for years and years and never get married. From this we have common-law marriage. This always leaves an open window of escape for both parties. Believers often fall into these traps too. Why? Because they never grasped what it means to say “God is love.” They never understand that true love is initiatory and unconditional. These are self-centered brats. And we have got some Christians who are 80 years old and they are still brats. They still do not know that God is love, they are still self-

centered, and they don't know how to love. No one is immune from this; no Christian is immune from this. If you don't take in Bible doctrine you will never come to understand who God is. And if you don't advance in your knowledge of God, then you won't know what love is because it is sourced in God. And if you don't know what love is, then how can you love God and how can you love one another? If the God of Christianity did not exist there wouldn't be love at all, period. God is the source of all love. Learning to love does not come by experience, trial and error. Learning to love comes by knowing who God is by study of Bible doctrine.

Without a doubt, John the apostle was one of the greatest teachers in the early church. Tradition says that John the apostle pastored the mature church at Ephesus during his later years. Because John was such a great teacher, he must have realized that the less mature people in the congregations where this letter were read would think John's level of expected Christian experience were too difficult. Therefore, in the last section of John's first epistle, he deals with practical concerns and questions that his teaching might have raised.

Before John discusses how we are to love our Christian brothers, he deals with what it really means to love our fellow Christian. In the process he deals with some potential excuses for not loving our fellow Christian.

Greek Text 4:20 ean tis eipe hoti agapo ton theon kai ton adelphon autou mise, pseustes estin; ho gar me agapon ton adelphon autou on eoraken, ton theon on ouk eoraken ou dumatia agapan.

Translation 4:20 If someone says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen.

The first potential excuse is found in v. 20. What **if someone says, "I love God,"** but he actually **hates his brother**? In other words, you see a Christian brother hating another Christian. Let's say you follow the Scriptural way of dealing with this situation and you confront him about his failure to love another believer (Matt. 18:15-17). This guilty Christian may try to sidestep the issue by saying "Well, at least **I love God!**" How should you respond? You should respond with this biblical argument: The Bible says the guilty Christian **is a liar**. The reason **he is a liar** is because how can one who hates **his brother whom he has seen...love God whom he has not seen?** In other words, how can you hate someone visible but love someone who is invisible? If you cannot love someone who is visible, then you certainly cannot love someone who is invisible. One excuse a Christian

might try to use in this situation is to make the claim that it is easier to love the invisible God than fellow Christians because God's character is all-good. Because God is all-good and because He deserves our love, He is easy to love. But fellow Christians are not all good, they have faults. And it is not easy to love those who have faults.

A similar argument is used by Jesus in John 3:12 when Jesus confronts Nicodemus. Jesus says to him, "*If I told you earthly things [visible things] and you do not believe, how will you believe if I tell you heavenly things [invisible things]?*" See the argument? It is much easier to believe things that we can see than it is to believe things that we cannot see. God tells us that the earth is about 6,000 years old. If we can't believe what God says about the age of the earth, then how can we believe what God says about salvation, eternal life, etc.? See the force of this argument? The argument is based soundly on a way of knowing things. How do we know? We know because of revelation. How do we know the earth is about 6,000 years old? Because we accept God's interpretive revelation of the visible data. How do we know about the way of salvation and eternal life? Because we accept God's revelation of the invisible data. We know both earthly and heavenly things because of God's revelation. It is this that the unbeliever abhors. He wants to give the data his own interpretation.

Now, returning to 1 John 4:20, John is using a similar argument here. How do we know if we love the invisible God? Well, are we loving our fellow Christians who we can see? If we are not, then there is no way we can be loving the invisible God. It is much easier to love someone you can see than someone you can't see.

I have constantly been insisting that those commentators who claim that a genuine Christian cannot hate another Christian are living in a dream world. The text says **if someone says, "I love God," and hates his brother**. One must first be a Christian brother before he can **hate his brother** (*ton adelphon autou* = the brother of him). The Greek is clear that a genuine Christian can hate another Christian. It does not matter what your theology tells you. When it comes to matters of theology, it must be built on the grammar and historical background in the Bible. So, I don't care if it doesn't fit your theology, your theology is supposed to be pliable. When you find a text that does not fit your theology, it is your theology that must change. You cannot twist the Bible to make it fit your theology. But this is what people do all the time because they have made their theology and the mind of the Christian the infallible guide rather than the word of God.

What is love? We have been talking a lot about loving God and loving others, but what is love? Love, according to John and other NT writers, is that which seeks the highest good

for the one loved. We can do this in two areas: (1) seeking their highest good in the physical realm, physical needs to sustain physical life (food, water, shelter, etc.); and (2) seeking their highest good in the spiritual realm, spiritual needs to sustain spiritual life (prayer, teaching, accountability, discipline, restoration, etc.). In short, we should seek the highest good for the entire being of the one loved, both in his body and his spirit. Love is expressed by actually *doing* for them not merely *feeling*. We are to love “in deed” and, therefore, “in truth” (1 John 3:18). No matter how much we say we love someone or claim to feel a love for someone, John says the reality of genuine love is demonstrated by our actions toward them in the spiritual and physical realm.

Therefore, since actions are the main ingredient of Christian love, then there is no difference between loving God and loving other Christians brothers. The test to see whether we **love God** is to see whether we are being obedient to His commandments (John 13:34). If we disobey His commandment to love other Christians, then we cannot be loving God. It does not matter how sincerely emotional you may be toward God. If you are not obeying His commandments, you are not loving Him. **Christian love is expressed in terms of obedience!** This connection is made abundantly clear in the next verse.

Greek Text 4:21 kai tauten ten entolen echomen ap autou, hina o agapon ton theon agapa kai ton adelphon autou.

Translation 4:21 And this commandment we have from Him: that he who loves God loves his brother also.

John says that **we have from Him** a direct commandment. This could refer to Christ or the Father. It really matters very little because everything that Christ said came directly from the Father (John 15:15). The problem is, where did Christ give this command? Where did Christ say that the one who loves God *should* love his brother also? The word *should* is not in the original text but is added to help explain. This may be a command that Jesus gave that was not recorded in the gospels. John says in his gospel chapter **21:25** “*And there are also many other things which Jesus did, which if they were written in detail, I suppose that even the world itself would not contain the books that would be written.*” So, there were many things that were not recorded. We call this uncaptured revelation. What we have in the Protestant canon of 66 books is what we call captured revelation. The closest thing we have to this commandment that is recorded is found in John 14:15, “if you love me, keep my commandments.” In other words, if you love Christ, keep His commandments, one of which is loving your Christian brother. One who is loving God is loving his brother. In fact, that is exactly what a literal word-for-word translation of the Greek says here. Notice how I translated this in the insert of your bulletin: **that he who loves God loves his brother**

also. You cannot love God without loving your brother and you cannot love your brother without loving God. They go hand in hand. If you want to increase your love toward God, then the only way to do it is to learn more of His commandments. That is the only way to do it. You cannot do it by turning up the praise music one more notch on the volume dial. That has nothing to do with loving God. You cannot do it by crying one more tear. You cannot love God more by going charismatic. You love God more by obeying His commandments. These other techniques are external shows that people put on. They are deceptive techniques used to convince other Christians that they love God. But the underlying motivation is that they are spiritually inept and they resort to methods of trying to convince men rather than God that they love God. It has nothing to do with spirituality or loving God. It has to do with their own failure to advance spiritually. You can disagree with me all you want about this, but that is what God says and that is just the way it is.

It is interesting that I find very often that Christians cover for other Christians who are out of it, stuck in sin patterns. They love this person and so they cover for them. And the most common cover I hear is, “Oh, but he loves God.” That is the most common thing I hear. I’m sorry, but people who are stuck in sin do not love God. Sin is opposite of the commandments of God. This is just self-deception. We don’t want to think that our loved ones are stuck in sin. We don’t want to confront the situation head on, so we make the situation fester by covering for them. It doesn’t help any. I also hear this one a lot, when a kid is in trouble or something, the parents and grandparents say, “Oh, he’s a good boy though.” What did Jesus tell the rich young ruler when he came to Jesus and addressed by saying, “good teacher”? Do you remember how Jesus responded? “Why do you call me good? None is good but God” (Luke 18:18). Friend, face the facts. We should not cover up for our kids, we should do something about it. We should face the situation head on. He is not a good little boy. He is a bad boy. When we do bad, we are bad. I’m sorry; covering for our kids is just empty chatter. When we do good, where does that good find its source? God. It does not come from us. None is good but God. So, ALL good comes from God. When we do righteous works, it is God working them in us.

Greek Text 5:1. pas ho pisteuon hoti Iesous estin ho Christos, ek tou theou gegennetai, kai pas ho agapon ton gennesanta agapa [kai] ton gegennemenon ex autou.

Translation 5:1. He who believes that Jesus is the Christ, has been and is born (perfect tense) of God, and he who loves Him that begot (aorist) also loves the one who has been and is begotten (perfect) of him.

Let’s move on because the next verse flows directly out of 4:21. The chapter division is unfortunate. We might ask, “Okay, I know that I am to love my Christian brother and that

if I am loving God, then I am loving my Christian brother. But who is my Christian brother? How do I know who my Christian brother is?" John's answer is simple, "**He who believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God.**" This is John's consistent definition of a Christian. Turn to John 20:31-32, John's theme verse of his gospel. If you recall, the gospel of John is a series of eight signs that Jesus did. What was the purpose of John recording these eight signs? "Therefore, many other signs Jesus also performed in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; ³¹ but these have been written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name." John always defines a Christian as someone who **believes that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God.** Those who believe **have life in His name.** Unfortunately, many theologians define a Christian quite differently. Many define a Christian as someone who has good works, a good lifestyle or obedience to God. But a Christian is not defined by any of these. A Christian is defined solely by *faith in Christ.*

Defining a Christian as one who has faith in Christ exposes another common excuse: "I don't have to love that guy because his life is so wretched, there is no way he could be a Christian." The modern church has more than a few "fruit inspectors." They are ready to tell us who is saved and who is not saved. But many of these "fruit inspectors" are not saved themselves because it is apparent that they have never understood the grace of God who "imputes righteousness apart from works" (Rom. 4:6).ⁱ

When it comes to loving another Christian, his lifestyle is irrelevant. Christian love is never based on performance. The real reason we should love another Christian is stated next by John: **Whoever loves the Father loves the child born of Him.** "Why do I love a child of God? Because I love the Father of that child! And if I do not love the child, I am simply lying if I say that I love his Father (4:20)."ⁱⁱ We may not like the things a child does, but that is irrelevant when it comes to love! Love is not conditioned on the child's behavior but on the fact that this child's Father first loved me so much that He sent His one-of-a-kind Son into the world to die for my sins as well as the child's sins. Therefore, we love one another when we love the Father who begot us all.

Greek Text 5:2. en touto ginokomen hoti agapomen ta tekna tou theou, hotan ton theon agapomen kai tas entolas autou poiomen

Translation 5:2. by this we know that we love the child of God, when we love God and do His commandments.

By this is *cataphoric*, meaning it refers to what follows, beginning with the word **when.** If we wonder whether we love the child of God we can simply ask, "Do I love God? Am I

doing His commandments?” Interestingly, those two questions are one and the same question, according to the next verse. The love of God is keeping His commandments! So, the test for whether we love other Christians is simply to see whether we are following the commandments of God. One of the commandments of God is to love one another (John 13:34). However, it is important that John introduces the word **commandments** in the plural. He’s not just talking about one commandment (as in 1 Jn. 2:7f; 3:23; 4:21). He is talking about all the **commandments** given to Church saints during the present dispensation (not the Old Testament law). We might say it this way. If we want to know whether we are loving other believers, we should see if we are following God’s commandments for this present dispensation. As we learn to keep/obey His **commandments**, we are verifying that we love the children of God. This is important to grasp.

What better thing can I do for my fellow brothers and sisters in Christ than to be a living model of Christ-likeness? If I obey His **commandments**, then I will reach out to them when they are in need (either spiritually or physically). My life will be a model of Christ-likeness and will serve as a teaching tool for other believers. My life will be an apologetic of God and will either confirm him or convict him of his behavior. So, whenever I love God by obeying His **commandments**, I necessarily love my fellow Christian.

**Greek Text 5:3a. aute gar estin he agape tou theou, hina tas entolas autou teromen,
Translation 5:3a. For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments.**

With what John has just taught us, we should not be surprised that how we **love...God** is by keeping **His commandments**. So far, John has followed a sequence in his argument. First, he told us in 5:1b that if we love the Father, we love the child of the Father. Then in 5:2, John says that when we love the children of God, we love God and keep His commandments. Finally, here in 5:3a, John puts the whole thing together quite succinctly. **Loving God** consists of keeping **His commandments**. He adds this important verse to point out one important fact: when we **keep His commandments**, we (1) love God and (2) love the children of God.

In conclusion, John makes certain that we should not measure our love for God or another Christian’s love for God by evaluating our emotions. Emotions are not a valid indicator of our spiritual state. In fact, often our feelings are wrong and can send us into self-deception (1 Cor. 3:18). The only valid test for whether we are loving God or not is “Am I doing what God has commanded me to do?”

Summary:

2 Excuses:

1) I may not love my brother, but I love God!

Liar: how can you love someone you *have never* seen and hate someone you *have* seen?

2) Well, I don't have to love that guy because his life is such a mess that he can't possibly be a genuine Christian.

Wrong: Genuine Christians are not defined by their works of obedience or lack thereof but by faith in Jesus as the Son of God.

Wrong: We don't love other Christians because of their works of obedience but because of the Father who begot them.

Loving God is not defined in terms of how emotional one is about God, but rather by whether one is keeping God's commandments or not. When we keep His commandments, we are both loving God and loving the children of God.

ⁱ Hodges, Zane, *The Epistles of John* (Irving, TX: Grace Evangelical Society, 1999), 212-13.

ⁱⁱ Hodges, Zane, *The Epistles of John* (Irving, TX: Grace Evangelical Society, 1999), 213.

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