

The First Epistle of John

...so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ (1John 1:3)

1John 5:2-3

Review

Where is John writing from?

What heresy was he addressing?

What flavor of Gnosticism was John specifically dealing with?

What did the heretics teach?

How does John deal with this false teaching?

1John 1:6-10

Someone read vv4:18-21

Someone else read vv5:1-6

John is constructing a threefold test of authentic Christianity: truth, righteousness, and love. John says three specific times in this letter that, if you claim to know God, but yet walk in the darkness of disobedience, you are a liar (v 1:6). Later, he says that to claim to possess the Father and yet deny the deity and incarnation of the Son is also to be a liar (2:4). There cannot be a genuine Christian life and yet a denial of the deity and incarnation of the Son. Thirdly, to claim to love God while you ignore or mistreat your brothers and sisters, is to lie (4:20). You are a liar if you say you love God and yet you do not love your brothers. This is the absence of love.

And if you live in the realm of lies, where do you live? (GJn 8:44).

Let's take a closer look at v2.

“By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and observe His commandments. “ (1 John 5:2 NASB)

“By this...” By what?

This is the standard way John either gathers up what he has been discussing, or looks forward to what he is about to write. Which function do you think it serves here?

It looks forward to “when we love God...”

“The love of God and the love of the brethren do in fact include each the other” (Westcott).
Each is a test of the other.

“When we love God” is in a Greek tense that stresses continuous action: “Whenever we keep on loving God.” The same is true of “observing His commandments.” It also is in a Greek tense that signifies continuous action, meaning literally “keep on doing His commandments.”

For “doing” see 1Jn 1:6.

The NASB has ‘observe’, the NIV has ‘carrying out’, thereby conveying the continuous aspect of the verb.

Here is a sticky question: Someone may say, "How can I know that I truly love my brother? Sometimes there are differences of opinion between us, sometimes we do not agree. There are times when I must do things that seem to offend my brother, and I don't always please him. Does this mean that I don't love him? If there are sometimes disagreements between us, does this mean that I don't love him?"

The answer is in Verse 2: "By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and obey his commandments." When our actions toward our brother arise, not out of our personal feelings toward him, but out of our love for God and our desire to obey his Word; in other words, when love is expressed by righteousness, then we can be confident that it is really love. Imagine a Christian girl says, "My boyfriend is a Christian, but he wants me to tell a lie for him. He says that if I really love him, I'll tell the lie to protect him. Now, should I do this? If I don't do it, he'll be angry with me and he'll say that I don't love him."

How should you respond?

"Tell him you love him enough to refuse to lie for him. Lying is wrong and harmful, destructive to his life. Tell him you love him enough to tell him the truth about his lying."

That is what John is referring to here. Sometimes love must do the unpleasant thing. If it is an unpleasant thing that is being done because it is prompted by love to God and obedience to his commandments, well then, it is love, even though it makes someone angry, or upsets them temporarily. Do not be disturbed by that reaction. Love sometimes must be – to quote the song from the 80's – “cruel to be kind.”

“Here is the wretchedness of what we ordinarily call "white lies." I have come in my own thinking to regard white lies as the blackest of all. They are the most dangerous, they are the most deadly, they often do more harm than the outright lie. What is a white lie? It is a way of pleasing yourself by avoiding displeasing another person. You tell them a little fib about how they look, or act toward you with unpleasantness. Thus, we avoid making others angry with us by using white lies. But if you think that through, you will see that what we are really doing is

loving ourselves more than them. We do not want to be hurt by their reaction, so we avoid telling them the truth.” (Ray Stedman)

What it really amounts to is that we do not love them enough to help them face the truth. Consequently, some of them may go on for days, weeks, even years doing things that offend others and never understanding what their problem is, and we call that love! It is not love, it is dislike, it is actually *hate*. It is a refusal to face, and to help them face, the truth. Only the truth delivers, only the truth sets free.

If you can gently and graciously help another to see a fault, without yourself becoming self-righteous or condescending, then you know that you love that person with God's love. "By this we know that we love the children of God," if we are acting out of love for God and a concern for obeying his commandments.

“Acting” is a key word, here. *Agapē* love is active and practical. Love for the brethren is expressed “in deed and truth” (see 3:18) in sacrificial service.

Love for God *is* keeping His commandments. Someone find GJn 14:15 & 21 and read it aloud.

“In short, love to God and love to the brethren confirm and prove each other. If either is found alone, it is not genuine” (Plummer).

John is well aware that there were sensitive believers among his readers (including us!), and he seeks to reassure them by stressing that **WHENEVER** we keep His commandments, we are expressing both love for God and love for our brothers and sisters in Christ.

“Whenever his soul may be harassed by unbrotherly relations, whenever he may feel like declaring before the brotherhood:

To live above with saints in love,

That will indeed be glory;

To live below with saints we know

Is quite another story;

Whenever troubling questions seek to arise in his mind concerning his true status as a believer – then these varied experiences of true love for God can be of precious, reassuring significance to that believer” (Hiebert).

Let’s move onto v3. Somebody read that verse aloud, please.

"For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments. And his commandments are not burdensome." (or “do not weigh us down,” NET).

In the time John was writing, who had burdensome commandments?

The Pharisees. Modern day Orthodox Jews are the spiritual offspring of the Pharisees. What about in Christianity? In what ways are the Pharisees alive and well in Christian congregations?

Let's look at some indications by Jesus Himself: Mat 23:4

But instead, what does Jesus say about His commandments?

See Mat 11:30.

According to Rom 12:2, God's will is "good, acceptable and perfect." It is the will of an All-Wise, All-Loving Father who seeks our highest welfare.

"Love" is made definite by the inclusion of the article (*he Agapē*) which means that John had a specific kind of love in mind. What do you think that is?

The selfless love that he's been talking about all along.

According to the commentator Hobbs:

While we cannot separate love and action, we do not simply love by *doing*. We *do* because we love. One might keep God's laws selfishly with a hope of reward, but this is no proper response to God's love. Christian love does not ask "must I" but "may I"; it does not count the cost, but weighs the privilege.

They are not difficult, though they seem to be at first. They are not a crushing burden which exhausts one's strength and destroys one's freedom in Christ. If we keep His commandments, if we DO them, if we will really love one another. We will love one another to the point of helping in the face of unpleasant truth and we will discover that the results are not burdensome but delightful. If done in the right way we find it easy and a wellspring of joy, producing riches of friendship and blessing.

If we can, as the commentator REO White says: "the statutes become songs, and the commandments become stepping stones to freedom."

God never commands us to do something impossible; He always supplies the power to accomplish His good will in our lives.

This is the activity of love. See how practical John gets. If we love with God's love we will do so out of a concern for his commandments, for righteousness. There you have the blending of the three marks of authentic Christianity: belief in the truth, an obedience to God's Word, and a manifestation of love. Those are the signs. These prove that anyone who possesses them has been born of God.

Verses 4 and 5 then give us the results that will naturally follow ... but you'll have to return next week to hear these results!