

Mercy Hill Church

1 John • Relating in Love to God and Others • 1 John 4:19–5:5 • No Date

Main Point

Our love for others stems from God's love for us.

Introduction

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

What is something in your life, either as a kid or in recent years, that you worked really hard to save money for?

What about that purchase or experience did you value? What motivated you to save?

In our world, people spend money to acquire the things that they value. What if we became known for spending massive amounts of love on what we value: God and other people? If we truly love God, then we will be compelled to extend His love to the people in the places where we live, work, and play.

Understanding

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

| Have a volunteer read 1 John 4:19-21.

What reasons do these verses give us for why we should practice godly love?

Look back at 1 John 4:7-18. What do these verses reveal about the way we are to relate to God and others in love?

We love because God first loved us. Our love represents the response of gratitude to God's initiative. Our capacity to love comes from God. Believers love with a love that does not originate with them. John reminded his readers of the commandment they had received. The one who loves God should love his brother also. Jesus brought together the two commands to love God (Deut. 6:5) and to love one's neighbor (Lev. 19:18) (see Mark 12:28-31). Those who love God will keep His commandments. Practicing godly love is both a response to God's love and an act of obedience. The real test of our love for God is how we treat the people around us. We show we have experienced God's love by loving others.

If you have learned to love others as these verses urge us to do, what will you do to give God the credit for the loving attitude you demonstrate toward others?

How can you guard against the temptation to allow others' actions determine the extent or nature of your love for them?

| Have a volunteer read 1 John 5:1-5.

Throughout 1 John, John applied three tests to those who claimed to be Christians and have knowledge of God: the tests of obedience, love, and belief. In the opening verses of chapter 5, the apostle brought together these main characteristics of those born of God—belief in Jesus as the Christ, love for God and for one another, and obedience to God's commands. Faith, then, becomes his primary emphasis in this last chapter.

Why is loving people one of the clearest indicators of a person's love for God?

Another indicator John mentions of a person's love for God is obedience to His commands. Why is it important to remember that God's commands are not burdensome?

Read Matthew 11:28-30. What does Jesus mean by taking up His "yoke"? By the "rest" He promises to those who do? Are you living a life with an easy yoke? Why or why not?

The Jewish people struggled under an enormous load of religious expectations and legalities that were laid on them by their religious leaders. Jesus, on the other hand, was offering them a life of freedom. While following Him still requires the work of obedience, it is work that is motivated by love for Jesus and a desire to serve Him. When we take up Jesus' yoke, He will teach us how to live under the light burden He offers and to enjoy His rest.

How does your obedience to God affect your love for others?

Even as believers cannot love God without loving His children, so also they cannot truly love God's children without loving God. Loving God and loving other believers are both bound up in the family relationship. Love is not so much an emotional experience as it is practical and active. Such love issues in moral obedience. If believers truly love God, they not only love His children; but they also obey His commandments.

Read 1 John 5:4-5. According to this passage, what is the victory that has conquered the world?

What is this faith linked to?

John provided another reason believers can obey God's commands: God gives His children power to overcome temptation which hinders obedience. Jesus' victory over sin and death has set His people free from

the power of Satan. Faith is the basis of our victory. When we place our faith in Jesus, nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ (Rom. 8:37-39; 1 Cor. 15:57). No forces of evil can conquer the person who trusts in Jesus. Instead, the believer is victorious over sin through his faith in Christ. Seen this way, this verse should be a matter of encouragement, because in spite of the struggle with sin in our daily lives, the victory is already won. Our salvation is secure.

Apart from Jesus and His victory over sin and death, what are some things you're tempted to put your faith in? How have they backfired on you?

In your own words, how are faith, love, and obedience intertwined?

The firm conviction that the Jesus of history is the Christ, the Son of God, who overcame the world and brought salvation and life enables Christians to triumph as well. He gives His followers faith to conquer. The certainty of victory also assures believers that in dependence on God's power they can love God and His children and obey His commands. Our faith enables us to live victoriously in Christ by loving God and obeying His commands.

Application

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

How does today's text affect the way you view others? In light of that view and God's calling, how will your actions toward people change?

What does your current level of obedience to God communicate about the depth of your love for Him?

How can we guard against letting the actions of others determine the extent or nature of our love for them?

If you have learned to love others as these verses urge us to do, what will you do to give God the credit for the loving attitude you demonstrate toward others?

Pray

Spend a few minutes in prayer with your group. Showing true love to God and others is one of the most challenging aspects of our faith. Pray that everyone in your group would experience conviction from the Holy Spirit this week as they evaluate how they reflect Christlike love and where they have room for improvement. Pray that everyone takes this call to love one another seriously, and ask God to give them graciousness and patience as they learn how to love well.

Commentary

4:19-21. God first loved us and made a relationship with him possible. The text drives home its refutation of the antichrists and false prophets. We cannot claim we love God and then show that we hate our brothers. This only proves one thing: we are liars. It is difficult to prove whether or not we love God based on our actions toward him because we cannot see him. Love for God is reflected in love for his children, our brothers and sisters, whom we can see. Therefore, God gave us this verifiable command: Whoever loves God must also love his brother. Jesus stated the principle in other words: whatever you did not do for one of the least of these you did not do for me (Matt. 25:40).

5:1. We hear it again—one who believes in Jesus is born of God—but with a new twist: the person who loves the Father loves God’s child as well. This is an appeal to the natural order of things. If we love our parents, we should also love his children, our siblings. Conceivably, a person might love his parents and not love his brother or sister. For the Christian, this is a test of regenerate character: if you love God, you will love your brothers, too. These extreme and stark terms were demanded by the seriousness of the situation in Ephesus. The antichrists were apparently acting hatefully toward Christians, so the Ephesians needed the contrast of love with hate, not perfect love with imperfect love. We do not have to love our brothers perfectly to manifest a regenerate heart. We may love them imperfectly as we all do. If we hate them, as the antichrists did, we cannot have any confidence that we are born again.

5:2-3. These verses present the opposite of what we expect—that we know that we love the children of God by loving God and carrying out his commands. We expect to hear that we demonstrate our love for God by loving our brothers. The opposite appears. This demonstrates that love is a central characteristic. As a genuine mark of a born-again heart, it goes both ways: toward God and toward our brothers. This love for God, then, is most clearly demonstrated by obeying him: “If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love” (John 15:10). Obedience does not always bring cheer to our hearts, so a profound statement follows: his commands are not burdensome. This stands contrary to what most people think. Certainly, God’s commands are not always the path of least resistance in life. In that sense, it is often easier to disobey God than to obey him. If obeying a command of God is harder than disobeying, the consequences are easier. For example, if it is harder to remain faithful to one’s spouse (obeying the command not to commit adultery) than to give in to passion (disobeying a command), then the consequence of obeying (not committing adultery) will be much easier than the consequences of not obeying (committing adultery). In other words, sin has a price. When it is paid, we see it would have been easier not to have sinned. So in the long run, obeying God’s commands is not burdensome. This is why Jesus could say his yoke is easy and his burden is light (Matt. 11:28-30).

5:4-5. Some Christians see their weakness regarding temptation and sin and decide their victory over the world is incomplete. They conclude that since they have not “overcome the world,” they must not be truly Christian. This is not an accurate understanding of this verse. John has already encouraged his readers that

they are from God and have overcome ... because [he] who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world (4:4). The victory is already won. We won it (past tense) with our union in Christ, and we win it (present tense) by our refusal to deny him. Faith is the basis of our victory. When we place our faith in Jesus, nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus (Rom. 8:37-39; 1 Cor. 15:57). No forces of evil can conquer the person who trusts in Jesus. Instead, the believer is victorious over the world because of his faith in Christ. Seen this way, this verse is not a matter of discouragement or fear that because we struggle with sin in our lives, we may not be Christians. Rather, it should be a matter of encouragement because in spite of our struggle with sin in our daily lives, the victory is already won. Our salvation is secure in Jesus.