

It's in keeping with historic Christianity to assert that the Scriptures are both a divine and human document—which is to say that while God the Holy Spirit inspired the human author in such a way to secure every word He intended—He did not override his individual personality—thus Paul has his own style of writing distinct from Peter, Luke, and James—and so as we have been walking with John now for 53 weeks, it's become apparent that one thing peculiar to him is the tendency to repeat the same truths over again—for example, if we were to take the time this morning we would realize that most of the phrases used within verse 20-21 have been used earlier—some of them as much as 6 or 7 times...

Now while this fondness for repetition may be peculiar to John, it's in no way limited to him—for example, Peter wrote in his second letter 1:12—“Therefore, I shall always be ready to remind you of these things, even though you already know them...”—that is, he understood that for various reasons we all stand in need of being told the same things often—and so John, with pastoral sensitivity understood the need to patiently repeat what he has already written...

Now this confirms what I already knew byway of my own experience, namely—we have the need to be continuously exhorted of the same things—we start out strong to change in some particular area, only to soon run out of steam, slow down, and perhaps quit altogether...

For example, several weeks ago I preached a short series on Spiritual Leadership, and I encouraged you men to lead your little flocks in daily family worship—and I know that some of you were convinced of this need and you began to gather your family daily around the Scriptures—but let me ask you—How are you doing now [some 10 weeks later]—are you still persevering in this or have you lost steam—or else there may be a certain sin that you've been fighting for some time—you slay it only to have it return the next day or week with a long scar across its face—how are you doing—are you still slaying it, or have you lost steam...

You see, implied in all of this is this important truth—the Christian life in many ways is a tedious continuation of starting over and over in a given area—we could say that our sanctification has certain similarities with housework—ladies, you clean your entire house on Monday—completely spotless, until Tuesday—when you have to start all over and do the same old thing again—well this is similar to us, there may exist certain areas of our lives where we get it all cleaned up one day, only to have to clean in again the next—or there might be certain responsibilities [such as family worship], that must be began again and again—but let me make a deal—I wont grow weary in reminding you of these things as long as you promise not to grow weary in starting over again...

In coming to the final two verses of this fourth chapter, there is a sense in which we come to John's final application of what he began in v7—if you recall last week I suggested that v19 served as a bridge from his emphasis upon God's love for us (vv7-18), and our love for God and others (v20—5:2)—that is, having expounded upon God's love for us John now turns again to our love for others...—and I want to examine these two verse under three main headings...

- I. A Clear-cut Assertion—v20a
- II. A Rhetorical Question—v20b
- III. A Repeated Command—v21

I. A Clear-cut Assertion—v20a

1. Here I refer to the straightforward statement that such people as liars—“if someone says, I love God, and hates his brother, he is a liar...”
2. Let us briefly consider this clear-cut assertion, by answering three questions—[1] what does John mean by the phrase—“if someone says, I love God...”
3. By this John refers to someone who makes an open and public profession, which may or may not be legitimate...

4. For example, John said back in 2:6—“he who says he abides in Him ought himself also to walk just as He walked...”
5. That is to say—the one who claims to be in Christ, has an obligation to walk in a holy and loving manner as did Christ...
6. In our text John refers to a person who has made a false claim or an empty profession—they say one thing with the mouth but another with lives...
7. Thus John refers to someone who has made a profession that he loves God—he claims to be a Christian person...
8. Notice [2] what does John mean by hating our brother—“if someone says, I love God, and hates his brother...”
9. We find the same word used twice before, 1Jn.2:9—“he who says he is in the light, and hates his brother, is in darkness until now...”
10. 1Jn.3:15—“Whoever hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him...”
11. The word translated “hate” refers to a deep and prolonged hostility—a habitual detestation of another professing believer...
12. If we define “love” as the affectionate desire to do others good, then “hatred” entails a desire for another person’s harm or destruction...
13. Thus John earlier said—“whoever hates his brother is a murdered...”—not that they actually or literally killed anyone, but they murdered them in their hearts...
14. Paul seems to indicate in Tit.3:3 that essential to this hatred are two things, malice and envy—“for we ourselves were also once foolish...living in malice and envy, hateful and hating one another...”
15. Now we have to clarify that John is not implying that we are to love everything about every person within the church...
16. In fact we have to make a necessary distinction, that while we are to love our brother’s person we are not to love his sins...
17. In fact to overlook sin is the very essence of hatred, Lev.19:17—“You shall not hate your brother in your heart. You shall surely rebuke your neighbor, and not bear sin because of him...”
18. But as we behold within our brethren various moral flaws and blemishes, this ought to endear their persons all the more to us...
19. For example, think of mother of 6 children—one of which was born with some physical or mental deformity...
20. Is this going to make her love this child more or less—more of course as her pity and compassion are aroused at the sight of poor child...
21. Well this is similar with reference to us—we all to some degree are spiritually and morally deformed—not one of us are without a flaw or blemish...
22. And as we look upon each other, our pity and compassion ought to be aroused and our love kindled, while in no way condoning the sin...
23. Notice [3] why does John refer to them as liars—to state it plainly—they are liars because they say something that is not true...
24. Webster defines a lie as—“a falsehood uttered for the purpose of deception...”—thus a liar is a person who attempts to convince someone something that is untrue...
25. 1Jn.2:4—“he who says, I know Him, and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him...”
26. Now the question might here be asked—who is such a person attempting to deceive—and the answer is obvious—God, others, and himself...
27. In Acts 5 we have the account of Ananias and Sapphira, who attempted to deceive the church about the amount of money received, having sold a possession...
28. We read in v4 the stern words of Peter—“why have you conceived this thing in your heart? You have not lied to men but to God...”
29. That is, in attempting to deceive the disciples they were in fact lying to God—they were attempting to deceive God in believing something that wasn’t true...

30. Yet it's possible that such lairs have deceived themselves, 1Jn.1:8—"if we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us..."
31. That is, they attempted to convince their own conscience that they had no sin or that they were not responsible for their sins—such people are self-deceived liars...

II. A Rhetorical Question—v20b

1. Having stated in no uncertain terms that a person who claims to love God yet hates his brother is a liar, John now provides the reason why...
2. V20b—"for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen..."
3. But the question I want to answer here is this—why does John speak with such certainty that it's impossible for someone to love God who they can not see if they fail to love those they can see...
4. Notice [1] the one is easier than the other—by this I mean that John makes an argument from the lesser to the greater...
5. By lesser I mean that which is easier and by greater I mean what is more difficult—loving our brethren is easier because we can see them, loving God is more difficult because He is invisible...
6. We have the tendency to think that loving our brethren is harder than loving God—as we find so much that is unlovable in them and nothing but loveliness in God...
7. Thus we at first might be tempted to think that John has his arguments backwards—surely he is not implying that loving our brethren is in a sense easier than loving God...
8. But, yes, my dear brethren, that is precisely what John is saying—because we are yet in the body we are governed by bodily senses—hearing, sight, and smell...
9. And because we can see, hear, and smell the brethren, there is a sense in which it's easier to love them than God who we can neither see, hear, or smell...
10. Thus John makes very plain—if we claim to love God who we cannot see, then this of necessity will manifest itself in loving those around us that we can see...
11. Martyn Lloyd-Jones—"We tend to think instinctively that it is easier to love God than to love our brethren, and we think so for this reason: The brother is guilty of sin; he is not perfect, and there are many things about him which we dislike. But as for God, God is perfect; God is without sin. He has no flaws, nothing which is in any way unpleasant in His character or in His nature. Therefore, we tend to argue, in human terms only, that it ought surely to be easier for us to love God than it is to love our brother. There are so many hindrances and obstacles to loving our brother which are entirely absent in the case of God..."
12. And so John argues from the lesser to the greater—if you can't even love man who can see, how are we to believe that you love God who you can not see...
13. For example, think of man who enjoys sitting in his chair, reading lofty books on the glories and attributes of God [by the way I wish that more of would follow his example]...
14. And he says to himself—Wow how awesome is God—how worthy of my heart's love—I can't wait until the Lord's Day comes that I might lift up my voice in adoration and thanksgiving...
15. And yet he shows little if any practical love towards his wife and kids—he speaks with a rough and rude tone, and he fails to practically consider their needs before his own...
16. Or else, think of the little boy or girl, who tells their parents that they love God—and yet they repeatedly disobey their parents and openly mistreat their siblings...
17. You may tell them you claim to love God who you can not see and yet you fail to love your brothers who you can see...
18. Notice [2] the one is related to the other—by this I mean, the invisible God is necessarily related to His visible people...
19. John brings this out more fully in 5:1b—"everyone who loves Him who begot also loves him who is begotten of Him..."
20. That is to say—every Christian person really and literally bears the divine image—they reflect the actual nature of God...
21. Thus there is a sense in which to love them is to love God, for they bear His image—they have the resemblance of God upon them...

22. There is the sense in which we can see, hear, and smell God upon them, and thus to not love them is to not love Him...
23. Let me illustrate—lets us say that a man and woman were about to go out on a date, and for the first time leave the children home by themselves...
24. Let's say that the oldest child has now turned 15 years old—and before leaving the father explains to all the children that they are to be kind and loving towards one another in his absence...
25. Now throughout the night as they show love for another they are in fact obeying their father as an expression of love...
26. Thus when they loved each other they were loving their father, and when they failed to love one another they were failing to love their father...
27. Likewise our Father is not physically present with us—we can not see Him—but He was told His children to love one another—and if we do not then we do not love Him...
28. Our Savior put it this way in Jn.14:15—“If you love Me, keep My commandments...”—and what is His commandment but that we love one another...
29. Thus when we love one another we are in fact loving Christ and when we are not loving another we are not loving Christ...
30. Now I want you to stop and let this sink it for a moment—husbands you love Christ no more then you love your wives...
31. Wives, you love Christ no more then you respect and submit to your husbands—children, you love Christ no more then you honor and obey your parents...
32. We have the tendency to separate these—Of course I love God, but I just have a hard time loving the brethren, my wife, and my children...
33. But you see these two are inseparable from one another—we love the invisible God no more then we love our visible brethren, wives, children, and parents...
34. V20—“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...”
35. Now before I leave this point I think it's necessary for me to make a single clarification—John is not saying that our capacity to love God is determined by the degree we love others...
36. To put it another way—this passage does not support the view that in order for a person to love God they must first love themselves and others...
37. Such teaching has been popularized by the intrusion of secular psychology into the church—a view championed by all sorts of supposed Christian psychologists...
38. In short the theory goes like this—love for our selves is the foundation, upon which is built love for others, which results in the pinnacle—love for God...
39. Thus the more you love yourselves, the more you are able to love others, and in turn, have more capacity to love God...
40. Now what do we say to this—well, I would have you notice v21 where John makes plain that our love for God is the reason behind our love for man...
41. V21—“and this commandment we have from Him: that he who loves God must love his brother also...”—love to God is first which results in love to man...
42. Thus our Savior summarized the law as—“you shall love God with all your mind, heart, soul, and strength [and then], you are to love your neighbor as yourself...”
43. Thus what John is saying in v20 is that failure to love the brethren is evidence that we have not truly or rightly loved God...
44. He is not saying—to the degree you love the brethren will be the degree you are able to love God—no—but instead, the degree that we love the brethren, manifests or makes known how much we in fact love God...

III. A Repeated Command—v21

1. The repetition I refer to is of course the command to love another, v21—“and this commandment we have from Him...”

2. By such terminology John means to say he received this command expressly from the lips of Christ Himself...
3. Now admittedly it becomes difficult to know how to expound a command that is repeated so often within the same letter...
4. For example, Samuel Pierce, an 18th century Baptist, preached 93 sermons through 1John, almost a sermon on every verse...
5. His sermons average 8 pages in length while his sermon on v21 is but six pages—the point being, he had less to say simply because he’s already said it several times before...
6. Others, such as Martyn Lloyd-Jones, take it along with v20 and 5:1, virtually saying little upon v21 directly...
7. But we must be careful at this point, for we can be tempted to view such repetition as meaningless or even tedious...
8. But I suggest to you that there are important reasons behind it—that they Holy Spirit would not have inspired John to repeat this command unnecessarily...
9. Now that John does repeat this command, I trust is readily acknowledged—in fact I have counted no less than seven express commands to love one another within this single letter...
10. For example, 3:11—“for this is the message that you heard from the beginning, that we should love one another...” v16—“by this we know love, because He laid down His life for us. And we also ought to lay down our lives for the brethren...” v18—“my little children, let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth...”v23—“and this is His commandment: that we should believe on the name of His Son Jesus Christ and love one another, as He gave us commandment...”
11. 4:7—“beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God: and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God...” v11—“beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another...” and then our text, v21—“and this commandment we have from Him: that he who loves God must love his brother also...”
12. Over and over again he says the same thing—that it is the commandment of God to love one another—not merely an option but a gospel obligation—“he who loves God must love his brother also...”
13. Let me suggest four reasons behind this purposed and necessary repetition, notice [1] the importance of love...
14. By this I mean that love [both to God and to our brethren] is the summery of all that God’s expects from us...
15. Rom.13:8-10—“Owe no one anything except to love one another, for he who loves another has fulfilled the law. 9 For the commandments, "You shall not commit adultery," "You shall not murder," "You shall not steal," "You shall not bear false witness," "You shall not covet," and if *there is* any other commandment, are *all* summed up in this saying, namely, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." 10 Love does no harm to a neighbor; therefore love *is* the fulfillment of the law...”
16. Notice trice the apostle says that love fulfills the law (vv8,10)—which is to say—when we love we are in fact keeping the other commandments...
17. Notice [2] the high cost of love—by this I refer to the high cost that the Father and Son paid so that we can love...
18. What did the Father pay you ask—He gave His only begotten Son—and what did the Son pay—He became a man and died the death of the cross...
19. Rom.8:3-4—“For what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God *did* by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, on account of sin: He condemned sin in the flesh, 4 that the righteous requirement[s] of the law might be fulfilled in us who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit...”
20. Notice [a] the cost, consider especially the second half of v3—“God did by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, on account of sin: He condemned sin in the flesh...”
21. Here we find the high cost that both the Father and the Son paid to have a loving people—the Father sent His won Son in the likeness of sinful flesh [that is Christ assumed human nature in it’s fallen and weakened condition, sin excepted]...
22. He sent Him—“on account of sin...”—that is for the purpose of sin—Christ came to Savior of the world, He came to save His people from their sin...

23. The next phrase tells us how—“He condemned sin in the flesh...”—that is, the Father poured out the condemnation that sin deserved upon Christ...
24. God’s wrath was satisfied or appeased in punishing our sins in Christ’s body—“He bore our sins in His body on the tree...”
25. In the words of John Stott—“God judged our sins in the sinless humanity of His Son, who bore them in our place...”
26. Notice [b] the purpose, v4—“that the righteous requirements of the law might be fulfilled in us who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit...”
27. In other words Christ died to have a people in whom the righteous standard of His law might be practically fulfilled in them by His Spirit...
28. For notice, it is by the Spirit indwelling them that they are enabled to walk in harmony to these righteous requirements and fulfill them...
29. Ezek.36:27—“I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will keep My judgments and do them...”
30. Thus the word translated “fulfilled” refers to an evangelical obedience or fulfillment of the law, for example, Rom.13:8—“he who loves another has fulfilled the law...” Rom.13:10—“for love is the fulfillment of the law...”
31. Gal.5:14—“For all the law is fulfilled in one word, *even* in this: You shall love your neighbor as yourself...” Gal.6:2—“Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ...”
32. Jas.2:8—“if you really fulfill the royal law according to the Scripture, You shall love your neighbor as yourself, you do well...”
33. You see fulfilling the law is not bad but very good—Christ died so that His people would be enabled to fulfill His law by His Spirit...
34. And so the one who is obeying this law—that is fulfilling it by the power of the indwelling Spirit, is fulfilling the purpose for which Christ died...
35. 2Cor.5:15—“and He died for all, that those who live should live no longer for themselves, but for Him who died for them and rose again...”
36. William Hendriksen—“The purpose and result of Christ’s work of redemption was that his people, by means of the operation of the Holy Spirit in their hearts and lives, should strive, are striving, to fulfill the law’s righteous requirement. Out of gratitude for, and in response to, the outpouring of God’s love, they now love God and their neighbor...”
37. Thus I suggest that one primary reason why John repeats this command is because of the high cost paid that it might be obeyed...
38. 1Jn.4:21—“and this commandment we have from Him: that he who loves God must love his brother also...”
39. Notice [3] the difficulty of love—that is, we need to be constantly commanded to love because loving the brethren is not always an easy thing to do...
40. By this I refer to the various hindrances to love that exist both within our selves and others—these could be summarized as remaining sin...
41. Rom.7:21-22—“I find then the principle that evil is present in me, the one who wishes to do good. For I delight in the law of God according to the inward man...”
42. Notice [4] the blessedness of love—here I refer to the multiple blessings that accompany love—glory to God and good to others...