

1 John 4:20

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar: for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen?

Analysis

If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar: for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen? John exposes the impossibility of claiming to love God while hating fellow believers. "If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother" (ean tis eipē hoti agapō ton theon kai ton adelphon autou misē)—the present tenses indicate ongoing states: claiming to love God while simultaneously hating one's brother. This describes religious profession contradicted by loveless living.

"He is a liar" (pseustēs estin)—blunt condemnation. Pseustēs means liar, one who speaks falsehood. There's no diplomatic softening—claiming love for God while hating believers is a lie, demonstrating false profession. John uses similarly stark language throughout the epistle (1:6, 10; 2:4, 22), showing that genuine Christianity involves truth, not mere sentimentality.

"For he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen?" (ho gar mē agapōn ton adelphon autou hon heōraken ton theon hon ouch heōraken ou dynatai agapein). The logic is irrefutable: if you cannot love your visible, tangible brother, how can you possibly love the invisible God? The perfect tenses emphasize permanent states—the brother you have seen and continue seeing, the God you have not seen and cannot see (in His essential glory). Loving the visible should be easier than loving the invisible; if we fail at the easier

task, we certainly fail at the harder. The test is conclusive—love for fellow believers evidences love for God; hatred proves such claims false.

Historical Context

This principle appears throughout Scripture. Jesus taught that the second greatest commandment (love your neighbor) is like the first (love God) and summarizes the law with these two (Matthew 22:37-40). James condemned honoring rich while despising poor as violating love's royal law (James 2:8-9). Paul taught that love fulfills the law (Romans 13:8-10). The consistent biblical witness is that vertical love for God must manifest in horizontal love for others, particularly fellow believers.

The early church's mutual love was both a distinguishing mark and a evangelistic tool. Tertullian recorded pagans saying, "See how they love one another." Yet even in apostolic times, divisions and lovelessness plagued churches (1 Corinthians 1-4, James 2, 3 John). John's stark declaration that hating brothers while claiming to love God makes one a liar addressed this persistent problem. It challenges every generation of Christians to examine whether profession matches practice.

Related Passages

1 John 4:8 — God is love

1 Corinthians 13:4 — Characteristics of love

Revelation 20:12 — Judgment according to deeds

Matthew 25:31 — Final judgment

Study Questions

1. How can you honestly evaluate whether you truly love God when your love for fellow believers (visible evidence) is imperfect?
2. What hatred or deep dislike of fellow Christians exists in your heart that exposes your claim to love God as potentially false?

3. Why is loving visible brothers a necessary test and evidence of loving the invisible God rather than an optional addition?

Interlinear Text

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|----------------|---------------|---------------|----------------|---------------|------------|-------------|---------------|-------|----------------|
| ἐάν | τις | εἶπη | Ὅτι | ἀγαπᾶν | τὸν | Θεὸν | καὶ | τὸν | ἀδελφὸν |
| If | a man | say | G3754 | I love | G3588 | God | and | G3588 | brother |
| G1437 | G5100 | G2036 | | G25 | | G2316 | G2532 | | G80 |
| αὐτοῦ | μισῇ | ψεύστης | ἐστίν· | ὁ | γὰρ | μὴ | ἀγαπᾶν | τὸν | |
| G846 | hateth | a liar | he is | G3588 | for | not | I love | G3588 | |
| | G3404 | G5583 | G2076 | | G1063 | G3361 | G25 | | |
| ἀδελφὸν | αὐτοῦ | ὃν | έώρακεν | τὸν | Θεὸν | ὃν | οὐχ | | |
| brother | G846 | whom | he hath | G3588 | God | whom | not | | |
| G80 | | G3739 | G3708 | | G2316 | G3739 | G3756 | | |
| έώρακεν | πῶς | δύναται | ἀγαπᾶν | | | | | | |
| he hath | how | can | I love | | | | | | |
| G3708 | G4459 | G1410 | G25 | | | | | | |

Additional Cross-References

1 John 3:17 (Love): But whoso hath this world's good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him?

1 John 2:9 (Parallel theme): He that saith he is in the light, and hateth his brother, is in darkness even until now.

1 John 4:12 (Love): No man hath seen God at any time. If we love one another, God dwelleth in us, and his love is perfected in us.

1 John 2:4 (Parallel theme): He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him.

1 John 2:11 (Parallel theme): But he that hateth his brother is in darkness, and walketh in darkness, and knoweth not whither he goeth, because that darkness hath blinded his eyes.

1 Peter 1:8 (Love): Whom having not seen, ye love; in whom, though now ye see him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory:

1 John 1:6 (Parallel theme): If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth:

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