

1 John 4:20 Commentary

PREVIOUS

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FELLOWSHIP WITH GOD AND HIS CHILDREN
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Charts from [Jensen's Survey of the NT](#) - used by permission
Another Overview Chart - [1 John](#) - [Charles Swindoll](#)

BASIS OF FELLOWSHIP		BEHAVIOR OF FELLOWSHIP	
Conditions of Fellowship	Cautions of Fellowship	Fellowship Characteristics	Fellowship Consequences
Meaning of Fellowship 1 Jn 1:1-2:27		Manifestations of Fellowship 1 Jn 2:28-5:21	
Abiding in God's Light		Abiding in God's Love	
Written in Ephesus			
circa 90 AD			

From Talk Thru the Bible

1 John 4:20 If someone says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar; for the one who does not love his brother whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen ([NASB: Lockman](#))

Greek - ean tis eipe (3SAAS) hoti Agapo (1SPAI) ton theon kai ton adelphon autou mise (3SPAS) pseustes estin (3SPAI) o gar me agapon (PAPMSN) ton adelphon autou on heoraken (3SRAI) ton theon on ouc heoraken (3SRAI) ou dunatai (3SPPI) agapan (PAN).

Amplified - If anyone says, I love God, and hates (detests, abominates) his brother in Christ], he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother, whom he has seen, cannot love God, Whom he has not seen.

NLT - If someone says, "I love God," but hates a Christian brother or sister, that person is a liar; for if we don't love people we can see, how can we love God, whom we cannot see?

Wuest - If anyone says: I am constantly loving God, and his brother is as constantly hating, he is a liar. For the one who is not constantly loving his brother whom he has seen with discernment and at present has within the range of his vision, God whom he has not seen with discernment and at present does not have within the range of his vision, he is not able to be loving.

- **Someone:** 1Jn 2:4 3:17
- **not seen:** 1Jn 4:12
- [1 John 4 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

A PROFESSION PROVEN TO BE A PREVARICATION!

A [prevarication](#) is a statement that deviates from or perverts the truth.

John Piper sums it up - "If you don't love your visible brother, then you can't be loving the invisible God."

Steven Cole - It's easy to deceive ourselves into thinking that we love God, when in fact we do not. Love that gives us confidence in the day of judgment is validated by our love for one another (1Jn 4:20). As usual, John doesn't mince words: "If someone says, 'I love God,' and hates his brother, he is a liar..." As **John Stott** points out (p. 170), the apostle uses the word liar with reference to each of the three tests. With regard to the moral test, he said (1Jn 2:4-note), "The one who says, 'I have come to know Him,' and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him." With regard to the doctrinal test, he said (1Jn 2:22-note), "Who is the liar but the one who denies that Jesus is the Christ?" Here, he applies it to the social test of love. **Stott** concludes, "However loudly we may affirm ourselves to be Christian, our habitual sin, denial of Christ and selfish hatred expose us as the liars we are." John's argument is that we cannot separate the two great commandments. It is easier to say, "I love God," because God is invisible and love for Him may be difficult to observe. But Jesus said (John 14:15), "If you love Me, you will keep My commandments." His main commandment is that we love one another (John 13:34; 15:12). So John is saying that genuine love for God necessarily will show itself in observable love for others. If you don't practice sacrificial, committed love for others, you are revealing that you do not really love God. ([1 John 4:17-21 Facing the Judgment with Confidence](#))

John calls for our **life** to match our **lips**, our **practice** (demonstration of love to our brother) to match our **profession** ("I love God.") The hypocrite says "I love God," but fails to demonstrate it as evidenced by the fact that he hates his brother, thus proving his **profession** to be a **prevarication** (lie). John explains that if we do not love those we can see, we absolutely cannot love the God we cannot see! Upshot - Don't say you love God. Enabled by His Spirit, show you love God by loving your brother!

William MacDonald - John emphasizes the futility of professing to love God while at the same time hating one's brother. As spokes get nearer to the center of the wheel, so they get nearer to one another. Thus, as we get closer to the Lord, the more we will love our fellow believers. Actually, we do not love the Lord a bit more than we love the humblest of His followers.

If someone says - At any time.

John describes the one who claims to love God, but by their failure to show love to believers, proves that their claim is false.

Stott - Love for God expresses itself not only in a confident attitude towards him, devoid of fear, but in a loving concern for our brothers and sisters (cf. 1Jn 3:14-note). The perfect love that drives out fear, drives out hatred also. If God's love for us is made complete when we love one another (1Jn 4:12), so is our love for God. John does not mince his words. If how a person behaves contradicts what he says, he is a liar. To claim to know God and have fellowship with God while we walk in the darkness of disobedience is to lie (1Jn 1:6-note; 1Jn 2:4-note). To claim to possess the Father while denying the deity of the Son is to lie (1Jn 2:22-23-note). To claim to love God while hating our brothers is also to lie. These are the three black lies of the letter: moral, doctrinal and social. We may insist that we are Christian, but habitual sin, denial of Christ or selfish hatred would expose us as liars. Only holiness, faith and love can prove the truth of our claim to know, possess and love God. ([The Letters of John - Tyndale New Testament Commentary](#))

Vincent - Note the striking inversion of the clauses: He that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, God whom he hath not seen cannot love.

Criswell observes that "This is the seventh erroneous statement which the author refutes directly (cf. 1Jn 1:6, 8, 10; 1Jn 2:4, 6, 9)" all of which begin with either "if we say" or "the one who says." Wiersbe adds "Here it is for the seventh time: "If a man say ...!" We have met this important phrase several times, and each time we knew what was coming: a warning against pretending."

Spurgeon on I love God - Not, "if a man love God," but if a man say, "I love God." It is a blessed thing to be able to say, "I love God," when God himself can bear witness to the truth of our statement; but the apostle says, If a man say, I love God,

Agapao in 1John - 1John 2:10, 15 (2x); 1Jn 3:10-11, 14 (2x), 1Jn 3:18, 23; 4:7 (2x), 1Jn 4:8, 10(2x), 1Jn 4:11 (2x), 1Jn 4:12, 19 (2x), 1Jn 4:20 (3x), 1Jn 4:21 (2x); 1Jn 5:1 (2x), 1Jn 5:2 (2x).

William Barclay - Love of God and love of man are indissolubly connected (1John 4:7**note**; 1John 4:11-**note**; 1John 4:20-21). As C. H. Dodd finely puts it: "The energy of love discharges itself along lines which form a triangle, whose points are God, self, and neighbor." If God loves us, we are bound to love each other, because it is our destiny to reproduce the life of God in humanity and the life of eternity in time. John says, with almost crude bluntness, that a man who claims to love God and hates his brother is nothing other than a liar. The only way to prove that we love God is to love the men whom God loves. The only way to prove that God is within our hearts is constantly to show the love of men within our lives. (1 John 4 Commentary)

Hates (3404)(**miseo** from **misos** = hatred) means to dislike strongly, to have a strong aversion to or to detest, all of these representing expressions of hostility of one person (or group) toward another (Mt 5:43, Lk 6:27, et al). Specifically the hatred can be directed toward God (Lk 1:71). Good hatred in Heb 1:9 (cf use of **miseo** in Lxx of Ps 101:3, Ps 119:104, 113, 128, 163, Ps 139:21-22). The majority of the NT uses of **miseo** convey the literal meaning of animosity towards God, people or particular attitudes.

Miseo is in the **present tense** which signifies this hatred is habitual. Their lifestyle is one of hating others! It is the polar opposite of agape love. Note that all five uses of **miseo** are in the **present tense** which describes a lifestyle of hatred. John has used **miseo** four times already in his epistle...

1John 2:9-**note** The one who says he is in the Light and yet **hates (present tense = continually)** his brother is in the darkness until now...

1Jn 2:11-**note** But the one who **hates (present tense = continually)** his brother is in the darkness and walks in the darkness, and does not know where he is going because the darkness has blinded his eyes.

1John 3:13-**note** Do not be surprised, brethren, if the world **hates (present tense = continually)** you.

1 John 3:15-**note** Everyone who **hates (present tense = continually)** his brother is a murderer; and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him.

John describes this hatred in his Gospel

John 3:20 "For everyone who does evil **hates (present tense = continually)** the Light, and does not come to the Light for fear that his deeds will be exposed. (Ultimately "the Light" is the Lord - Jn 8:12).

John 7:7 "The world cannot **hate (present tense = continually)** you, but it hates (**present tense = continually**) Me because I testify of it, that its deeds are evil.

John 12:25 "He who loves his life loses it, and he who **hates (present tense = continually)** his life in this world will keep it to life eternal.

John 15:18 "If the world **hates (present tense = continually)** you, you know that it has **hated** (perfect tense) Me. 19 "If you were of the world, the world would love its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, because of this the world **hates (present tense = continually)** you.

John 15:23 "He who **hates (present tense = continually)** Me **hates (present tense = continually)** My Father also. 24 "If I had not done among them the works which no one else did, they would not have sin; but now they have both seen and **hated** (perfect tense) Me and My Father as well. 25 "But they have done this to fulfill the word that is written in their Law, 'THEY HATED (aorist tense) ME WITHOUT A CAUSE.'

John 17:14 (Jesus praying to His Father says) "I have given them Your word; and the world has **hated** (aorist tense) them, because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world.

Spurgeon - And the word "**brother**" is to be understood in the widest possible sense. We are all brothers, springing from the same common parent; and therefore we ought to be philanthropists, lovers of man, loving even the guilty and the worthless, having an earnest desire to do good even to those who do us ill. If we have not yet reached that spirit, we had need begin our true Christian life, at the foot of the cross, by trusting and loving him who there died out of love for sinners; for there only can we learn, in the person of Christ Jesus our Lord, this divine philosophy of love to God and men.

Brother (80)(**adelphos** from **a** = denotes unity + **delphus** = a womb) means brother or near kinsman. "**Adelphós** generally denotes a fellowship of life based on identity of origin, e.g., members of the same family (Mt. 1:2; Lk 3:1, 19; 6:14); members of the same

tribe, countrymen, and so forth (Acts 3:22; 7:23; Ro 9:3)." (Zodhiates) Figuratively, **adelphos** describes members of the Christian community, spiritual brother, fellow Christian, fellow believer (Ro 8.29). Jews used **adelphos** to describe fellow countrymen (Acts 3:22).

Whom he has seen - The verb has seen is in the **perfect tense** signifying that he not only has seen his brother but as **Plummer** says he has him "continually before his eyes." Thus he is without excuse for not loving him!

Stott notes that "It is obviously easier to love and serve a visible human being than an invisible God, and if we fail in the easier task, it is absurd to claim success in the harder. 'It is a false boast when anyone says that he loves God but neglects His image which is before his eyes' (Calvin). As Dodd points out, this 'cannot' expresses not so much the person's incapacity to love God, as the proof that he does not. It is easy to deceive ourselves. The truth, however, is plain. Every claim to love God is a delusion if it is not accompanied by unselfish and practical love for our brothers and sisters (1Jn 3:17-18)." ([The Letters of John Tyndale New Testament Commentary](#))

He is a liar - The verb "is" (estin) is **present tense** signifying this man as a habitual liar. Truth be told (pun intended) we all lie from time to time (remember "little white lies" are black as night before God Who is perfect light!), but because believers possess the Spirit of truth (Jn 14:17, 15:26, 16:13), they simply cannot habitually lie. A lying Christian is a conscience smitten Christian, and cannot continue in the state ad infinitum. Either he confesses and repents or he is sorely disciplined by the Lord.

Liar ([5583](#))(**pseustes** from **pseudomai** = to lie) is one who speaks falsehood, untruth, and so attempts to deceive. Thayer adds that pseustes describes "one who breaks faith, a false or faithless man."

John describes the fate of all habitual **liars** - "But for the cowardly and unbelieving and abominable and murderers and immoral persons and sorcerers and idolaters and **all** (all who make it a lifestyle) **liars**, their part will be in the lake that burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death." (Rev 21:8) He explains who their father is (addressing Jews who professed faith [Jn 8:30-31] but did not possess faith [Jn 8:45-47]) ""You are of [your] father the devil, and you want to do the desires of your father. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because **there is no truth in him**. Whenever **he speaks a lie**, he speaks from his own [nature;] for he is a **liar**, and the **father of lies**." (Jn 8:44)

Spurgeon - It is very rude of you, John, to call people liars. But it is not John's rough nature that uses such strong language; it is his gentle nature. When a loving disposition turns its face against evil, it turns against it with great vehemence of holy indignation. You can never judge a man's character by his books. Curiously enough, Mr. Romaine. Of St. Anne's Church, Blackfriars, wrote the most loving books that could be; yet he was a man of very strong temper indeed. Mr. Toplady wrote some of the sharpest things that were ever said about Arminians; but he was the most loving and gentle young man that ever breathed. St. John, full of love and tenderness, hits terribly hard when he comes across a lie. He was so fond of love, that he cannot have it played with, or mocked or mimicked. "If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar."

In John's Gospel Jesus declared to those Jews who had professed faith in Him (Jn 8:31, but were not expressing saving faith) "You are of [your] father the devil, and you want to do the desires of your father. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. Whenever he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own [nature;] for he is a **liar**, and the father of lies. (Jn 8:44) Speaking to the same group later response to the Jews' question of whether He thought Himself to be greater than Abraham "Jesus answered, "If I glorify Myself, My glory is nothing; it is My Father who glorifies Me, of whom you say, 'He is our God' and you have not come to know Him, but I know Him; and if I say that I do not know Him, I shall be a **liar** like you, but I do know Him, and keep His word." (Jn 8:54-55) So Jesus called these false professors liars like their father the devil.

This is the fourth of five times in this short letter that John describes **aliar** three times referring to men and twice to God...

1Jn 1:10-**note** If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him **aliar**, and His word is not in us.

1Jn 2:4-**note** The one who says, "I have come to know Him," and does not keep His commandments, is **aliar**, and the truth is not in him

1Jn 2:22-**note** Who is the **liar** but the one who denies that Jesus is the Christ? This is the antichrist, the one who denies the Father and the Son.

1Jn 5:10-**note** The one who believes in the Son of God has the witness in himself; the one who does not believe God has made Him a **liar**, because he has not believed in the witness that God has borne concerning His Son.

For (gar) is a **term of explanation which should always prompt a pause to prayerfully ponder what the author is explaining**. In context, John is explaining how the professor of "**I love God**" is a **liar** and does not truly love God Who is invisible. Why? Because he **does not love his brother** who is visible!

His brother whom he has seen - The verb **has seen** is in the perfect tense signifying that he has seen him at a point in time and "continues to feel the influence of that sight." ([Alford](#)) This was not a passing glance like a fleeting shadow.

He... cannot love God Whom he has not seen - Love of God is shown to be legitimate by love for our brethren. If we refuse to love the tangible (brethren), we cannot claim to love the intangible (God)! The word "not" in both places is *ou* meaning absolutely cannot!