

# THE LOVE OF GOD AND THE LOVE OF MEN: AN EXEGESIS OF 1 JOHN 4:19-5:3

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4:19We love because he first loved us. 20If anyone says, "I love God," yet hates his brother, he is a liar. For anyone who does not love his brother, whom he has seen, cannot love God, whom he has not seen. 21And he has given us this command: Whoever loves God must also love his brother. 5:1Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God, and everyone who loves the father loves his child as well. 2This is how we know that we love the children of God: by loving God and carrying out his commands. 3This is love for God: to obey his commands. And his commands are not burdensome...

## INTRODUCTION

The significance of these verses can hardly be exaggerated if we want to learn about the theme of love in the New Testament. This is one of the loci classicus on the biblical teaching of love. The theological significance of the text depends, however, on a careful exegesis. In our study of the passage we focus on John's understanding of love. We try to answer the following questions: 1. What does the text say about the love of God? 2. What does it say about our love for God? 3. What does it say about our love for men? 4. How many commandments are there in John's mind? 5. Is there a priority among the different kinds of love?

It is difficult to decide where a line of thought begins or ends in 1 John. Commentators disagree whether the new thought begins with 4:7 (Brown, Burge, Smalley, Houlden), 4:13 (Marshall, Thompson, Jackman), 4:16b (Painter), 4:17 (Stott), 4:19 (Johnson, Bultmann, Thomas), or 4:20 (Candlish). They also disagree whether the argument ends with 5:3 (Painter), 5:4a (Brown, Johnson), 5:4 (Smalley, Burge, Bultmann, Marshall), or 5:5 (Stott, Thompson, Thomas, Jackman). Some see a division between chapter 4 and chapter 5 (Houlden, Candlish, Painter). We can probably justify all of these divisions, since John's reasoning is not tight and there are many overlaps and repetitions in his train of thought.

For practical reasons, I decided to divide the passage beginning with 4:19 and ending with 5:3. It is in v. 19 that John introduces his thought on love which is further elaborated in the verses following. "This short verse... serves as an introduction to the discussion that follows... v. 19 serves as a transition... a new turn in the argument is being introduced." (Thomas, 236) Without v. 19 we would not know that the basis of our love is God's love for us. The general and inclusive use of "we love" in v. 19 might have an effect on how we understand the relationship between "love for God" and "love for men". I chose 5:3 for the ending of the paragraph because I had to end the line of thought somewhere. There is no good choice, because wherever we stop we cut the flow of thought. For example, v. 4a naturally follows v. 3, v. 4b naturally follows v. 4a, and v. 5 naturally follows v. 4b. Since v. 4 introduces a new thought ("overcoming the

world”) with which I did not want to deal with in this study, I divided the passage at v. 3. My particular focus in this study is love, and according to Houlden “the first three verses clearly maintain the theme of love” (Houlden, 122).

## I. THE SUMMARY OF THE TEACHING OF THE PASSAGE

In 4:19-5:3 John continues the theme of love which he discusses throughout the entire epistle. In chapter 4 he writes about the need to love each other, the expression of God’s love for us in the sending of His Son as a propitiation, the necessity to stay in love and through that to stay in God, and the fact that love drives out fear from judgement.

a. *John’s argument.* Why does love drive out fear from judgement? Because God loved us first, and gave his Son as a propitiation for us. If we are made perfect in love, we are not afraid of judgement anymore. Instead, we also begin to love (4:19). God’s love precedes our love (19), our love is only a response to his love. Our love is directed to both God and to our brothers in Christ (20). There is no real love in us if we say that we love God, and yet, we do not love our fellow Christians (20). It is inconsistent to say that we love God whom we do not see (and therefore we cannot prove that we really love him), if we hate (a deliberately strong word to juxtapose love) those members of the Christian church whom we see (20). The only proof of our love is if we love those in whose case our love can be tested. The commandment is not just to love God, but also to love the brethren (21). It is a twofold commandment, which includes both love for God and love for men.

An expression of love for God is belief in Jesus Christ. If we believe in Jesus, we are born of God (5:1). And here is the logical necessity from another angle: if we are born of God, then we have to love those other people who are born of God. There is a family relationship that obliges us to love every member of the family. Not just the parent but the children as well (1). John says the same thing here as in 4:20-21, but from a different angle. We have to love the brethren if we truly love God.

John then does a puzzling and remarkable thing: he turns the argument upside down and says: how do we know that we really love the brethren? We only know that we truly love the brethren if we love God and keep his commandments (2). For the love for God is to keep his commandments. Only those love the brethren who love God. Why is it? Because those who love God keep God’s commandments out of love, and the main commandment is to love the brethren (3). For those who are born of God, this is not terribly difficult. Regenerated people are able to love, because they experienced the love of God and their love is a response to that.

b. *Love for God and love for men.* Love for God and love for men go hand-in-hand in the entire passage. In v. 20a we see a contrast: “If anyone says, ‘I love God,’ yet hates his brother, he is a liar.” John’s point is that it is impossible to love God and not love the brother at the same time. There is a connection

between the two objects of love: "For anyone who does not love his brother, whom he has seen, cannot love God, whom he has not seen." (20b) This relationship is further elaborated in the next two verses: "And he has given us this command: Whoever loves God must also love his brother." (21) The connection between the two kinds of love here is the commandment of God. God commanded us both to love Him and to love our brethren. "Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God, and everyone who loves the father loves his child as well." (5,1) In this verse membership in God's family connects the two loves: if we love the parent we also love the child.

The priority between the two kinds of love is explained in 5:2-3: "This is how we know that we love the children of God: by loving God and carrying out his commands. This is love for God: to obey his commands. And his commands are not burdensome..." We love our fellow Christians because we love God and therefore keep his commandments. Loving God is first, keeping his commandments is second, loving the brethren is third. The three are intermingled and cannot be separated from each other, but there is a logical order which cannot be reversed. Let us also keep in mind, that the love of God for us precedes even our love for God (4:19) and the transformative experience of the new birth enables us for both kinds of love (5:1,3).

We shall examine the text more closely now to see whether this summary is the correct understanding of John's teaching on love.

## II. THE LOVE OF GOD

Verse 19 introduces the theme of loving God and our fellow Christians. There is a strong contrast between v. 18 and v. 19, between fear and love (Johnson: 116). "We love because he first loved us". We do not fear but love instead. Our love is grounded on God's love (because of 4:9 the "he" must refer to *God*) who loved us before we loved. There are several questions we need to answer in order to properly interpret the sentence. How does His love manifest? What is the object of our love? Is it an imperative to love or is it in the indicative mood, stating a fact? What is the relationship between God's love and our love?

a. *How does His love manifest?* We know from the larger context of 1 John that God's love is manifested in two ways: 1. it is shown in *giving Christ to us as a propitiation* (4:9-10 "This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins."), 2. and in his *begetting us as his children* (3:1 "How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are!") This love is prior to our love. All love on our part is a consequence of God's giving us his Son and giving us new life in him.

b. *What is the object of our love?* There is a general agreement among commentators that the "we love" is inclusive, though a few commentators argue that it is either a reference to our *love for God* (Bonsierven, Houlden, B. Weiss), or a reference to our love for men (Bultmann, Schnackenburg) exclusively.

According to the immediate context, however, it is very likely that the “we love” refers to both, it is a “comprehensive understanding of love” (Johnson, 117) including both love for God and love for men.

c. *Is it an imperative to love or is it in the indicative mood, stating a fact?* Is John giving here a command to love or does he state a fact? I accept Raymond Brown’s conclusion: “It is difficult to determine whether *agapómen* should be read as a hortatory subjunctive, ‘let us love’ (Latin, Peshitta, Balz, Bonsirven, Bultmann [?], Hauck, Schnackenburg), or as an indicative, ‘we love’ (Brooke, Bruce, Houlden, Marshall, Metzger, Plummer, Schneider, Stott, B. Weiss, Westcott, Windish). ...There is really no way to decide, but the tone of confidence throughout this subsection favors the indicative, for ‘we love’ has the implication ‘we are able to love’.” (Brown, 532)

d. *What is the relationship between God’s love and our love?* According to Marshall, the relationship between the two is that our love is a “response of gratitude” to God’s love, and we have an “obligation to love in return” (Marshall, 225). However, it seems likely from the context that there is an even closer connection between the two. God’s love not only gives us reasons for gratitude, it is not only an obligation, but it is also an *enablement*. Both of the manifestations of God’s love, that we mentioned above, point towards this stronger link: 1. God’s love is manifested in sending his Son to us as a propitiation: “This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world *that we might live through him.*” (4:9) God’s love obliges us to love him in return, as Marshall says, but the teaching goes beyond that. There is a real new life as a result of God’s love, which is lived *through Christ*. There is a mystical union which enables us for a different kind of life, a life characterised by love. 2. The other manifestation of God’s love points to the same direction. God’s love is shown in that we are made the children of God through being begotten by the Father (3:1; 5,1). As we shall see, this new life makes God’s commandments (including the command to love) easy for us (5:3).

It is better, therefore, to speak of the relationship between God’s love and our love in terms of *enablement* or *empowering*. As opposed to Marshall’s view of a weaker link, this seems to be the scholarly consensus: “‘We love’ has the implication ‘we are able to love’.” (Brown, 532); “It is God’s love which enables authentic *agapé* love among Christians.” (Johnson, 117); Bede says: “From where would we get the power to love God if he had not loved us first of all?” (Bray, 217); “God’s love for us has empowered us to love both other human beings and God” (Thompson, 128); “This love of our brother is not a natural attainment, but a divine gift or qualification” (Candlish, 164); “His love has priority chronologically as well as theologically... Such a chronological priority carries with it the theological priority of God’s love. His love makes ‘our’ love possible. The transformative experience of God’s love not only obliges the readers to love but also empowers them to do so.” (Thomas, 237)

### III. THE LOVE FOR GOD

Some commentators think that there is no distinct love for God in 1 John. According to Painter, "In neither John nor 1 John, apart from 4:20 and the problematic 5:2, is there an unambiguous reference to love for God." (Painter, 285) In his opinion, the sentence "I love God" is not what people *ought to say*, but what people from the opposing party do actually say. There is no command from God to love God, there is only a false claim among the secessionists with regard to that. When Painter discusses v. 21, he retains his approach: "There is no command to love God here." (Painter, 287).

a. *Is love for God identical with love for men?* Painter and others equate love for God with love for the brethren. Painter says: "Certainly 1 John does not and could not repudiate outright the claim to love God, but nowhere in 1 John is there any indication as to what this means beyond loving one another (the brothers) and keeping God's commandments." (Painter, 294). This is also the view of Bultmann. Bultmann argues that "these verses are evidently directed against the gnosticizing notion that human love can be aimed directly at God", and he adds that they "endeavor to say that love intended for God can only be demonstrated in love for the brother... 4:20-5:2 makes the point that our love for God is realized only in love for the brother..." (Bultmann, 75-76). Here the words "realized only" are noteworthy. Johnson's conclusion is similar but more tentative: "The proof, perhaps the Elder would even say, the essence ("this is") of love for God is to obey his commands." (Johnson, 121)

b. *But can we understand John's words as denying the necessity for loving God as well as loving men?* Can we equate love for God with love for the brethren? This interpretation is loaded with difficulties. Even if v. 20 is a claim from John's opponents, and even if v. 21 does not talk about the command to love God (both of which readings I disagree with), how does Painter (and Bultmann) accounts for 5:2 which he mentions as an exception? The argument that the "reference in 5:2 has not left this context behind" (Painter, 285) sounds weak to me. M. M. Thompson emphasizes that "living out one's commitment to God by obedience rescues the concept of loving God from the purely private realm", but she rightly insists that "obeying the commands does not completely exhaust the meaning of 'love for God', and the two are not equivalent" (Thompson, 130-131). Smalley wisely puts it this way: "Obedience is a necessary outcome of loving God... but it is also a necessary *part* of that love." (Smalley, 269 - emphasis his). Or as Marshall says: "Bultmann, 76, wrongly claims that our love for God is expressed only in love for our brothers. On the contrary, love for our brothers is only part of the expression of our love for God, but an indispensable part." (Marshall, 226)

It is possible, as Painter argues, that John's opponents claimed to love God, John, nevertheless, does not say that to love God is wrong or to claim that one loves God is wrong. On the contrary, John seems to explain that we cannot love God or claim to love God if we do not love our brothers *also*. Whether this is the only manifestation of our love for God or simply a part of the proof, the importance of a manifestation or proof is always to show a reality that exists.

The reality that is manifested or tested here is our love for God. According to John we keep God's commandments because we love Him (5:3). Hence, those keep God's commandments who love Him. Love for God is not identical with keeping His commands, it is rather the source or reason for our obedience.

#### IV. THE LOVE FOR MEN

How do we interpret John's teaching on "love for the brother"? We have seen that the "we love" of 4:19 is a general and inclusive love. The one who is loved by God loves both God and the *brother*. The one who says: "I love God" cannot hate the *brother*. The claim to love God without love for the *brother* is a lie (4:20). The proof for loving the invisible God is loving the visible *brother* (4:20). It is the command of God that whoever loves God must also love his *brother* (4:21). The one who is born into God's family must love not just the one who gave life to him but all those who were given life with him (5,1). We know that we love the *children of God* if we love God and keep his commands (5,2).

a. *John and the Synoptic commandment*. It is natural to interpret this teaching in the light of the Ten Commandments and the summary Jesus gives: "'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments." (Matthew 22:37-40). And yet, there is a significant (?) difference between what Jesus says and how John words the same commandment. Jesus talks about loving the *neighbour*, while John talks about loving the *brethren*. Jesus makes clear in his parable of the Samaritan that anyone can be the *neighbour* without further qualification. Why does John talk about the brothers instead of talking about our neighbours? Is his view more exclusive than Jesus's teaching? Is his understanding of love a preferential love?

b. *The family metaphore*. It seems that John deliberately uses the word "brother". In this passage he does not talk about all men but only about fellow Christians. Brown argues that "the commandment always refers to love of one's fellow (Johannine) Christian and is narrower than the Synoptic commandment to love one's neighbour" (Brown, 534). Johnson agrees: "While it is a worthy sentiment, the Elder does not have in mind generic, human love; he limits his argument to what is or ought to be happening among those who claim to be Christians." (Johnson, 117)

This view can be substantiated by 5:1-2. John uses an interesting analogy from human life: "everyone who loves the father loves his child as well" (1). What does he mean? Whether this is only an analogy or whether this is the real situation does not make a difference. The father is (or represents) God, the child is (or represents) all those who are born of God. They are "the children of God" (2). As the child in the family loves not just the parent but all the other family members (John envisages an ideal situation!), so should the Christian love not just God but all the other Christians who are born from God as he himself is. Bultmann should be less tentative in his conclusion: "Whether the reference here

is specifically to the Christian brother or to the 'neighbour' is a moot question, although v 2 supports the former" (Bultmann, 76-77). Painter more forcefully makes his conclusion: "The arguments runs: if everyone with correct belief is begotten by God, the one who claims 'I love God,' that is, 'I love the one who has begotten all true believers, ought to love those who are begotten by him, who are God's children and the believer's brothers." (Painter, 292). Or as Thomas emphasises: "These words indicate that when one believes, he or she is born as a child of God into the family of God. This experience carries with it all the benefits of divine origin and the obligation of family life. In this case, the obligation includes love for both one's parent and one's siblings." (Thomas, 242)

c. *Why is John talking only about brothers?* My question is not dealing with the problem of gender. I do not think it is relevant to introduce 21<sup>st</sup> century sensitivities into the 1<sup>st</sup> century. We can take it for granted that John used the masculine word "brother" to include both brothers and sisters in the family of God. The use of the generic masculine possibly comes from the biblical understanding of male headship in both the family and the family of God (cf. 1 Cor 14,33b-34). He could not have used the feminine word "sister" with the same purpose. What I think is a more relevant question is why John narrowed down the command from *neighbour* to *brother*? The explanation is probably related to John's immediate context and the problems he was dealing with. The problem was not a community of believers who were indifferent to the surrounding world and its pains. The problem was a teaching which separated a certain mystical experience of God from a practical love for the other believers within the community. The emphasis is on immediacy in relationships, just as in Jesus' parable of the Samaritan, but the neighbour in this case is the brother most naturally. The situation probably required that John spoke more specifically about the Christian community. This does not mean that John disregarded the importance of the kind of love that went beyond the community. As Smalley says, "the scope of the love which is demanded of the believer is not ultimately, in Johannine teaching, restricted to those who are Christians (cf. 4:19-20; also John 13:34)." (Smalley, 268)

d. *The specificity of brotherly love.* We cannot simply escape the problem, however, by saying that John did think of unbelievers, he just did not mention them here. Why not? Because John uses very specific qualifications about the "brothers" whom we should love. The family metaphore very forcefully proves that John has believers in his mind, "the children of God" (5:2). This is a specific group bound together by a special bond. This is an exclusive group to which men can only born from above.

The best that we can say is that although John probably agrees with the necessity to love unbelievers, yet, he gave brotherly love a special status. This is the most precious love-relationship that can exist on earth, as a result of God's regenerating power. If there is no brotherly love, which should be the most natural expression of our love for God, there is no point talking about any other love, including love for our non-Christian neighbours.

## V. HOW MANY COMMANDMENTS ARE THERE IN JOHN'S MIND?

According to John Stott, "love for God and love for the brother form one single commandment" (Stott, 171). Stott connects 4:21 with 3:23, in which latter verse John says: "And this is his command: to believe in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ, and to love one another as he commanded us." If we accept that believing in Jesus Christ stands for loving God in 3:23, then it is plausible to understand 4:21 as one commandment which includes both love for God and love for men. This is supported by 4:19 where "we love" probably includes both love for God and love for men.

Many commentators follow the same logic and assume that there is one double command here and not two distinct commandments. Thomas speaks about the "indivisibility of love for God and love for one another" (Thomas, 239). Despite the similarity between Jesus's summary of the law, "in 1 John 4:21 there are not two commands but one: one command that involves love for both God and one's brother or sister" (Thomas, 240). Referring to Bultmann who "does not think that in Johannine theology we can love God in any other way than by loving one another", Brown says: "That is too narrow, and so I prefer to retain the coordination ('and obey His commandments'), understanding the second phrase as a necessary but not exhaustive specification of the first ('love God')." (Brown, 539).

We should be careful, however, not to reduce the force of John's argument to one single element instead of the two motifs that we see in the text. I agree with Stott that the two commands "form one single command" in John's mind. I agree with Thomas that the two are "indivisible". "Coordination" is a good word for the two parts of the double commandment, as Brown suggests. Yet, there is a danger in emphasising the unity of the two commands too much. I wonder if Brown sees the importance of his words when he says that loving the brothers is "a necessary but not exhaustive specification" of loving God (some of his other thoughts seem to deny this). If it is a true statement, and I believe Brown is right here, then we must always preserve a distinction between the two directions of love, keeping a place for a love for God *which is not exhausted* by loving men. Does not John himself imply this when he says: "Whoever loves God must *also* love his brother." (4:21)?

Whatever we think of the unity of the double command, two things are clearly in John's mind: 1. we ought to love both God and one another, 2. the two kinds of love cannot be separated from each other. In other words: there are two distinct directions of our love, and yet, the two form one single motif in the regenerate heart. "Intellectually, of course we draw distinctions between loving God and loving the brethren, but in actual practise, because of the nature of love and because of the nature of our love to God, it is impossible to love God and to desire to please Him without loving the brethren, because that is what God desires from us." (Lloyd-Jones, 198)



## VI. THE QUESTION OF PRIORITY

The remaining question is if there is a priority between “love for God” and “love for brothers”. While Brown maintains that there is a coordination between the two, he gets very close to Bultmann’s view that basically identifies “love for God” with “love for men”: “the Johannine author does not speak of two commandments, nor does he give priority to love for God. The one commandment involves both love for brother and love for God; and if there is practical priority, it is with love for brother.” (Brown, 564-5)

a. *The interpretation of 5:2.* The most interesting verse in the entire passage is 5:2: “This is how we know that we love the children of God: by loving God and carrying out his commands.” Those interpreters who exclude a love for God distinct from the love for the brethren, or at least question the prior or independent existence of such a love, find 5:2 particularly puzzling and embarrassing. According to Bultmann “verse 2 is most difficult, indeed almost incomprehensible” (Bultmann, 77). Brown also admits that he has difficulties in interpreting the verse: “we face a major difficulty of meaning: love for God becomes the criterion for knowing that we love God’s children, whereas a few verses earlier (4:20) the reverse was true: Love for one’s brother was the criterion for genuinely loving God... But how can the love for God, which cannot be measured, become the criterion for knowing the much more measurable love for brother?” (Brown, 537) Even Smalley, who admits that “love for the brethren” is only part of “love for God”, finds this verse “unexpected” and “unusual for John, who normally says the reverse” (Smalley, 267).

A popular “solution” to the puzzle is to change the natural meaning of the text. Raymond Brown lists several scholars who attempted to give a new meaning to John’s words, but he calls them “commentators’ proposals for what the author should have said – ‘improvements’ rather than translations” (Brown, 537). “Because of this unexpected departure from previous thought, various translations invert the Greek phrase to conform to the earlier expression.” (Thomas, 242)

It is a much more plausible solution to see v. 2 as part of a *circular reasoning*. “The two loves are inseparable (4:12); we are to love others in God, and God in others... If John’s arguments seems as a result to be somewhat circular, this may be ‘justified at the bar of practical experience’ (Houlden, 123). For the fact is that each kind of love (for God, and for others) demonstrates the genuineness of the other, and reinforces it. Brotherly love is proof of the love of God; but the reverse is *also* true (cf. Bultmann, 77).” (Smalley, 268) Brown shares this opinion: “To many this may seem circular reasoning: One tests love for God by love for brothers (4:20-21) and then tests love for brothers by love for God.” (Brown, 566). To try to avoid the problems of circular reasoning he puts John’s words into the context of his battle with the secessionists. Since they were not brothers and did not know agape love, they could not love God. “They may claim to love God”, but it is not real (Brown, 566). Thomas, on the other hand, does not think that circularity is a problem. “While such argumentation is open to the charge of circularity, it would not likely surprise the readers for it

represents the kind of integrative and dynamic thought characteristic of 1 John.” (Thomas, 243) Accepting the seed of truth in these arguments, I propose another solution.

b. *The priority or order of love in the passage.* I am convinced that even if John’s argument is circular, the circle begins somewhere and ends somewhere. There is an order in the interconnection of love of God, love for God, and love for brother. The order is this: 1. God loves us and his love is manifested in giving his Son as a propitiation and giving new life to us, 2. We love God in return, 3. Because we love God, we keep his commands, 4. Because we keep his commands, we love the brothers. The circularity consists in that whichever point we see realized, we know that the whole circle exists. If we love God, we know that we will love the brother also, because we keep his commands. If we love the brother, we know that we love God, since it is by loving God that we love the brother. This does not mean, that there is no starting point in the circle. On the contrary, 5:2-3 show us that the starting point is love for God, which is ultimately a result of being loved by God (4:19) and therefore being born again (5:1). The proof of all these is loving our fellow Christians.

Let us look at the order in detail. 1. Everything begins with the love of God to us. We saw this at point II, therefore we do not need to discuss it again.

2. We love God in return. We said at point II that God’s love *enables* us for loving him. The enablement comes from the life of Christ in us, the new birth from above. “God’ commandments are not burdensome” says John, but only for those who are born of God. “The Elder uses the concept of born of God as a way of showing why it is only logical to love both one’s brother and God.” (Johnson, 119); “What would be impossible in their own strength is ‘not burdensome’ for those born of God.” (Johnson, 122)

3. Because we love God, we keep his commands. Loving God precedes loving our brother. It is out of love for God that we keep his commands (5:3). As Candlish insists: “love to God is not ignored, or set aside. On the contrary, the very reason why loving your brother is insisted on so peremptorily is, that it is loving your brother in obedience to God, and out of love to God.” (Candlish, 167) Schnackenburg “finds a sequence of three arguments for the love of brother... love for the begotten flows from the love one has for the begetter” (Brown, 565).

4. Because we keep his commands, we love the brothers. “In loving your brother, you keep God’s commandment” (Candlish, 167). Because we love God, we keep his commandment. And because we keep his commandment (Matthew 22:39 “Love your neighbour as yourself”; John 14:12 “Love each other”), we love our brothers and sisters. Loving the brothers is, therefore not the beginning of loving God, but the result of loving God and thus keeping his commandments.

## CONCLUSION

The four most important findings in the passage with regard to love are these: 1. The love of God manifested in giving Christ and giving us new life enables us to

love. 2. Love for God and love for men can never be separated, they form one double command. 3. Within the double command there is a distinct love for God which is not identical with love for men, but always produces that. 4. There is a priority between love for God and love for men: the former precedes the latter.

Let me finish with the words of Martyn Lloyd-Jones who perfectly captures John's main emphasis in this passage: "John does not teach here that we must start by loving our fellow-men and women and then advance from that to loving God; that is an entirely false deduction from this statement. John is not saying, 'If you only love your fellow-men first of all because you see him, that will help you to rise up to the level of God, and you will begin to love Him.' Not at all! Rather, John says that if a man says he loves God and does not love his brother, he must be a liar. Or perhaps we can best explain it by saying that there is no separation between what our Lord called the first and second commandments. Our Lord indeed coupled the two together, and that must be so for this good reason: If the first commandment is that I should love the Lord my God with all my heart and mind and soul and strength, then it must follow of necessity that I am greatly concerned about doing what God asks me to do. And what does God ask me to do? The first thing He asks is that I should love my brother." (Lloyd-Jones, 197-8)

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