

1 John 3:11-24

Introduction

How can I be sure that I am loved by God and accepted by him?

That's an important question for us to be able to answer.

It's a question of assurance.

The Bible tells us that it's possible to know God and have eternal life through knowing him.

It tells us that we can relate to God as our heavenly Father and know ourselves to be his children.

But how do I know that's true of *me*?

How can I be confident that *I* am a child of God, who is loved by him and precious to him?

How can I be certain?

Well, John wants us to be certain.

And he answers that question right at the end of the passage we just had read for us.

Please glance down again with me at verses 23 and 24 with which the passage ends.

John says this: **And this is his command: to believe in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ, and to love one another as he has commanded us. The one who keeps God's commands lives in him, and he in them. And this is how we know that he lives in us: we know it by the Spirit he gave us.**

John's saying that two things are necessary for us to have assurance.

Firstly, we must have put our faith in Jesus. At some point in time, we must have come to trust him with our very lives.

And, secondly, we must love our fellow believers.

Faith in Jesus and love for his people always come together. And when we see evidence of these two things in our own lives, the Holy Spirit assures us that we are indeed God's children.

It's the second of these two basic elements of authentic Christian experience that this passage is concerned with. It's all about the command to love one another and what that love reveals about us when it's present.

And I've put as our first heading: Love is evidence of life.

Love is evidence of life

Please look down with me again at verses 11 to 15. John writes this:

For this is the message you heard from the beginning: we should love one another. Do not be like Cain, who belonged to the evil one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his own actions were evil and his brother's were righteous. Do not be surprised, my brothers and sisters, if the world hates you. We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love each other. Anyone who does not love remains in death. Anyone who hates a brother or sister is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life residing in him.

From the moment John's readers had come to faith they had been taught to love one another. And that's because love is what marks us out as God's children.

Think back to the 'All Together Time' earlier in our service. God made us. Like him. To love others. (Faith in Kids, *Who Am I?* Lesson 2)

We're not to be like Cain.

We read about Cain in Genesis chapter 4. He and his brother, Abel, were sons of Adam and Eve. Cain worked the soil, while Abel kept flocks. And we're told that, in the course of time, they each brought offerings to God. Cain brought fruit of the soil and Abel brought fat portions from the flock. But we're told, Cain's offering wasn't accepted by God, whereas Abel's was. In the New Testament, the writer of Hebrews points to Abel's heart: he was a man of faith. He was right with God. By implication, Cain wasn't. And he was furious. Rather than loving his brother, he was consumed with hatred and jealousy. And, eventually, that led him to murder. He killed his own brother. And John's point is that the absence of love revealed which family Cain really belonged to. Do you see that, in verse 12? He **belonged to the evil one...** not to God.

The devil hates God and hates those who belong to God. And those who belong to the devil do likewise. That's why John says: **Do not be surprised, my brothers and sisters, if the world hates you.**

We all belong to one of two families: either to God's or to the devil's. The world signifies all who belong to the evil one. The world is the whole system of humanity in opposition to God; rejecting his rule and seeking independence and autonomy. And the world's hatred of God spills over into hatred of those who belong to God. That hatred is evidence that someone **remains in death**, John says. In other words, hatred towards a believer is evidence that someone doesn't know God and doesn't possess eternal life. There is no life in them.

On the other hand, John says, love for our fellow believers is evidence that someone has **passed from death to life.**

Love for other believers always accompanies genuine, life-giving faith. If you love Jesus, then you'll also love those who belong to Jesus. That doesn't mean that we'll always find each other easy to love. Sometimes we might find each other very difficult to love. But, nonetheless, love for fellow believers is one of the distinguishing marks of those who are members of God's family. To love your brothers and sisters in God's family is evidence that you truly know God and have life through knowing him.

So here, then, is grounds for assurance. If we love our fellow believers that's evidence that we truly belong to God's family and have life in his name.

Love is evidence of life.

If you were here, think back to Jamie's sermon last week, when he spoke of the visible being evidence of the invisible. In Luke's Gospel, the visible healing of the paralysed man was evidence of the invisible authority of Jesus to forgive sin. The visible was evidence of the invisible.

We're familiar with that in everyday life. When we look out of the window, we can't see the wind, but we know it's blowing because we can see leaves rustling in the breeze. We can't see gravity, but we know it's real because we can see leaves falling to the ground.

The visible is evidence of the invisible.

And that's what John's saying here. How can we know that we possess eternal life? After all, it's invisible. We can't see it. How can we be certain that we really have it?

Well, John says, the visible is evidence of the invisible. The love we have for our fellow believers is evidence of the new life - eternal life - that resides within us.

Of course, for that to be true our love must be visible. And that's what John moves on to next... because true love *is* visible. It isn't merely a matter of words. Love is seen in our actions.

And that's our next heading: Love is seen in our actions.

Love is seen in our actions

Please look down again at verses 16 to 18. John writes:

This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters. If anyone has material possessions and sees a brother or sister in need but has no pity on them, how can the love of God be in

that person? Dear children, let us not love with words or speech but with actions and in truth.

Perhaps you remember those old cartoon strips that said, "Love is..." and then completed the sentence in various ways: "...when every day is Valentine's Day" or "...being there for each other" or "laughing at the same old joke" or whatever else it might be.

Well, here's what love is, John says. It's Jesus... hanging on a cross... dying for his enemies... doing for us what we're incapable of doing for ourselves... winning salvation and eternal life... though we have done nothing to deserve it.

Notice the contrast.

Cain murdered his brother. Jesus laid down *his* life for ours.

This is what love is.

It seeks the good of others, even those who don't deserve it.

It's sacrificial. It doesn't count the cost.

It's shown to those who can't reciprocate, without any thought of repayment.

And it's far, far more than just words.

God doesn't merely speak of his love for us. He became one of us in the person of his Son, Jesus Christ. And he laid down his life.

And, John says, we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters.

If we know God, then we'll love like God.

Real love is not just talk. It's seen in action. It's modelled on the love of Jesus for his people. And, John says, it's seen especially in providing for the needs of our fellow believers.

If anyone has material possessions and sees a brother or sister in need but has no pity on them, how can the love of God be in that person?

John's talking about our material possessions. He's saying that if one of our fellow believers was in material need, and we could help but did nothing, then how could we claim to know the God who loves them and cares about them?

If someone was struggling to make ends meet, and we felt no compassion for them, and were not moved to help them, then how could God's love be in us?

And this must apply beyond our material possessions.

We shouldn't need to work too hard to see what that looks like.

If a new mum in the church was buckling under the pressure of sleepless night and the constant demands of childcare, and we could help but did nothing, what would that say about us?

If an elderly member of the congregation was struggling to do basic chores, like mowing the lawn, and the weekly food shop, and getting out to pay the bills, and we could help but did nothing, how could we claim to love like Jesus loves?

If someone was sick and needed a bit of looking after, or having a hard time and needed a friend to talk to, or was feeling overwhelmed and needed some support, and we could help but did nothing, then where's the likeness of Christ in us?

But when we see someone in need, and have compassion for them, and do what we can to help them - especially when that's costly and sacrificial - then we are loving as Jesus loves.

Love isn't when every day is Valentine's Day. Love is when we seek the good of others, without counting the cost, without any thought of repayment, without even asking whether they deserve it.

When we love like that, we can have real assurance that we know God, because *his* love is in us, and we can see the evidence.

And when we love like that, we have confidence before God.

So that's our final heading: Love produces confidence.

Love produces confidence

Please look down again at verses 19 to 24. John writes:

This is how we know that we belong to the truth and how we set our hearts at rest in his presence: if our hearts condemn us, we know that God is greater than our hearts, and he knows everything. Dear friends, if our hearts do not condemn us, we have confidence before God and receive from him anything we ask, because we keep his commands and do what pleases him. And this is his command: to believe in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ, and to love one another as he commanded us. The one who keeps God's commands lives in him, and he in them. And this is how we know that he lives in us: we know it by the Spirit he gave us.

We know that we belong to God's family when we open our hearts to our brothers and sisters in need.

But there are times when our hearts condemn us. Sometimes our hearts can be calloused to the circumstances of those around us. We might become aware that someone in the

church is in some kind of need, yet our initial response isn't generosity but meanness. We don't want to bear the cost of helping them - there are other things we want to use our time and money for. We don't want to be put out. We don't want to change our plans. And we might tell ourselves that we can continue to love them without needing to do anything for them.

When our hearts are calloused like that, John says, they condemn us.

And we need to do something.

The NIV says that we need to **set our hearts at rest**. The word translated as 'rest' here is normally translated as 'persuade' or 'convince'. We need to persuade our hearts. When our hearts tell us to do nothing, we need to convince ourselves otherwise.

We need to remind ourselves of God's character. **God is greater than our hearts**, John says. He never lacks generosity. He doesn't share the meanness which we so often find lurking in our hearts. He always shows compassion to the needy.

So, when our hearts condemn us because of a lack of generosity, we need to persuade ourselves to be like our Father in heaven. We need to overcome our hard-heartedness by seeking to be like him.

And we need to remember that **he knows everything**. Any lack of generosity in our hearts will be noticed by him and judged accordingly.

On the other hand, **if our hearts do not condemn us**, but respond generously to the needs of our brothers and sisters in the church, then, John says, **we have confidence before God and receive from him anything we ask, because we keep his commands and do what pleases him**.

When we love one another in this way, we will find ourselves growing in confidence when we approach God in prayer. We will be increasingly confident that he will hear our prayers and answer them.

That's not because he's rewarding us for our obedience. It's because we're becoming more like him. Remember our 'All Together Time' again. God made us. Like him. To love others. When we love others, we're letting his will and character shape our own. And as that happens, we can be increasingly confident that the prayers we pray are the kind of prayers that he loves to answer. As we pursue a life of love, we will find ourselves asking for and receiving the things that are pleasing to him, both in our lives and in the lives of others.

And that's exciting!

What more assurance could we need that we truly *are* his dearly loved children.

Conclusion

John's writing these things so that we might be confident that we truly know God and assured that we have eternal life through knowing him.

And that assurance comes through believing in his Son, Jesus Christ, and through living a life of love after his example.

Let's pray.

Loving Father, please help us to love one another as you have loved us in Christ. Please help us to seek each other's good, especially those who are in need. And as we seek to love, please assure us that we are indeed your children, and members of your family. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.