

Confidence because we love like Jesus

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[0 : 00] I want to start with a question. The question is this. How confident are you that you are a Christian? How confident are you that you're a Christian? Are you sure that you are going to heaven?

If we were to get a measuring stick out now and put you to the test, are you sure that you would pass? In our series so far, we've been looking at what the commentators call the 1 John tests. And in very broad terms, here they are. There's the belief test, the sin test, and the love test. Belief, sin, love. Do you believe that Jesus is God's son?

Do you keep his commands, act righteously? Today, verse 11, we should love one another, the love test. The belief test, the sin test, the love test.

By calling them tests, though, it makes things quite tricky because it sounds like things that we have to pass to earn our way into heaven. And that is worrisome, particularly for today, when it's about loving brothers or sisters in Christ.

[1 : 01] In fact, one of the hardest things about being a Christian is all the other Christians you've got to deal with in the church. If love is the test, it's easy to feel like we're failures and doubt your place in God's family.

But that is the opposite of John's purpose. He's writing to give us confidence, not to take it away. And so it's best to think of them more like evidences rather than tests.

John says, if you want evidence as to whose family you're in, you just need to look at who you love. Verse 14, we know that we have passed from death to life.

Why? Because we love each other. Loving brothers and sisters in Christ, it's not just for the keen beans, not just for the social outgoing types, not just for the pastors.

In God's family, it's a non-negotiable for everyone. And this is our first point. So verse 11, for this is the message you've heard from the beginning, we should love one another.

[2 : 06] The command here comes from Jesus to John to you. From the very beginning, following Jesus has always meant loving brothers and sisters in Christ.

And to demonstrate how important it is, John picks the most extreme example that he can think of. Verse 12, do not be like Cain, who belonged to the evil one and murdered his brother.

Do you remember last week how we finished off the passage? It's verse 10 in your Bibles. This is how we know who the children of God are and who are the children of the devil. Anyone who does not do what is right is not God's child.

Anyone who does not love his brother or sister is a child of the devil. And John shows us devil's child number one, which is Cain.

Do you want some evidence that Cain belonged to the evil one? Verse 12, he murdered his brother. Do you notice that John doesn't even mention Abel's name?

[3 : 07] He just calls him Cain's brother. Christian, make sure you love your brother. Don't be like Cain, who murdered his.

Regardless of how people define love, clearly Cain fails to meet the mark. In the story from Genesis 4, which was read to us, Cain and Abel brought their sacrifices to God.

Abel offered the best of his portions as a sacrifice and Cain hated him for it. God warned Cain to be careful about his sin, but instead he invited his brother into the field where he rose up and murdered him.

He tried to lie about it. Am I my brother's keeper? He says very famously. And John says, For Christians not to love each other, that's as bad as being Cain.

It's stinging, isn't it? How black and white that is. How it's a non-negotiable if you're a member of God's family. But just for comfort, John clarifies exactly which brother you are.

[4 : 12] Look at verse 12. Why did Cain murder his brother? Because his own actions were evil and his brothers were righteous. So do not be surprised, my brothers and sisters, if the world hates you.

You see, despite our failings, we are not Cain. But we do get treated like Abel. That is, when we try to be righteous, the world still hates us, even the way Cain hated Abel.

When we get discouraged by the way Christians are treated in the world, maybe discouraged by the way we're treated amongst members of our own family, it's evidence of which brother you are.

You are not Cain, but you do get treated like Abel. I wonder how often you've tried to do the right thing. How often you've tried to be the Christian peacemaker, but it's blown up in your face.

As bad as that is, it's evidence of which brother you are. You are not Cain, you are Abel. We hope, don't we, that if we do the right thing, the world will love us for it.

[5 : 20] But the story of Cain shows that the unrighteous brother will hate the righteous one. Verse 14, here's some more confidence.

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.

Typical strong language from John, but these verses are for our confidence. These verses say there's a place called death and there's a place called life. The only way to move from one to the other is by Jesus who transports us to the life place.

No matter how many tests we pass, we can't move ourselves out of the place of death. The Bible is clear that only Jesus can do that for us.

If you're not a Christian here today, the sermon for you stops right here and you need to spend time thinking about how Jesus is the only one who can move you from death to life.

[6 : 21] You can't go further. Just think about that. That's where the sermon stops. For the rest of us in the room, the idea is that we don't go in reverse. You see, that's what hating people is.

It's not merely a human emotion, but at its root, hate is death. Verse 15, anyone who hates a brother or sister is a murderer. And you know that no murderer has eternal life residing in him. Hate is traveling backwards from life to the place of death, going in the opposite direction of the gospel, undermining everything Jesus did to save you from the death place.

And so here's the test. Do you love your brothers and sisters in Christ? Are you happy when they have a prayer answered? Or when they have a light bulb moment in a Bible study?

Or when they tell you that they're growing a little bit more? Or you can see them maturing in their faith. Are you happy? Or do you hate them for it? When we see other churches in our area that are growing?

[7 : 29] Are we happy and celebrating with them? Or would we rather take them to the field and murder them for their growth? To not love is awful.

It's more than just hateful feelings. It undoes the gospel. It travels backwards from life to death. Because verse 14, anyone who does not love remains in death.

Anyone who hates a brother or sister is a murderer. And murderers have no eternal life. The love test is huge, isn't it? It's a non-negotiable. It's not optional.

If you call yourself one of God's children, it's one of those non-negotiables he has for his family. And so to be clear about what we're talking about, because love means different things to different people, let's be clear and define what love is.

This is our second point. Verse 16, 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.

[8 : 32] And what John is doing, he goes from Cain in verse 12 to Jesus in verse 16. The contrast couldn't be greater. I put a table on your handout just to spell out the contrasts.

So Cain murders his brother. Jesus gives life to his brother. Cain was an evil one, taking a righteous life. Jesus is a righteous one, giving life to the evil ones.

When John says he laid down his life for us, he's quoting Jesus' own words when Jesus says, I am the good shepherd who lays down his life for his sheep.

The thief comes to steal and destroy. The hired hand abandons the flock at the first sign of danger. But the good shepherd loves the flock. How do you know? He lays down his life for them.

The definition of love all the way through the New Testament is always tied to self-sacrifice. True love is sacrifice. Jesus lays down his righteous life, picks up my evil life, and transports me safely

from the place of death.

[9 : 42] And that is the gospel right from the beginning, from Jesus to John to you. You see, if the world appreciates anything about Jesus, they love that he loves, don't they?

Even pagans, even non-Christians, they can see how noble Jesus is, loving Jesus. They love it. In fact, there are plenty of groups outside the church that try to be loving.

Your local probus group, your running club, your sporting club, rotary book club, craft group, even your circle of friends, they all believe in love and good on them, but there'll always be a limit of their love.

And I think it's right around the point where it's you versus them, where it's your comfort versus theirs, your stuff versus their stuff. But Christian love, verse 16, it should be unlimited.

And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters. Everyone loves to love, but a Christian's love should go further. Verse 16, sounds like he's asking you to jump in front of a bus or take a bullet for someone.

[10 : 53] And so verse 17, he shows us something far more every day. If anyone has any 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?

That's a good question, isn't it? Verse 17 asks, what do you see when you look around the church? Can you see a brother or sister in need? It's miles away from taking a bullet for someone, but something far more practical and every day.

It puts us to a very simple decision. Do you love your stuff? More than your brothers and sisters in Christ? It's not hard mentally, is it? But very hard if your heart belongs to the world.

If Jesus laid down his life for me, surely I can donate my material possessions to you, a brother or sister in need. It's not as glorious as dying for you, but it's far more everyday and practical.

Chapter 2, which we did a few weeks ago, it says, the world is passing away. Our material possessions are passing away. And so until they do, can you donate them to a brother or sister in need?

[12 : 07] Can you give them the stuff that you own? The model of social care in the Bible is always church first, Christians first, the world second.

Even beyond the Christians at HCD, it's wider churches, global, international churches, struggling missionaries, struggling churches, AFES partners on the local university campus.

\$1,000 to us is like \$10,000 to them because lots of them, for all intents and purposes, are like professional beggars asking for financial support.

\$1,000 to us is like \$1,000 to them. Can you see a brother or sister who needs the stuff that you own? Here's the test. If we have no pity on them, that is, if we close our hearts to them, that's Cain, isn't it?

That's like Cain. Am I my brother's keeper? They're not my problem. Verse 17 asks, how can the love of God be in that person?

[13 : 15] A lack of love, it undermines the fact that Jesus laid down his life for me. It cheapens the sacrifice that he laid for me on the cross.

And so here's some encouragement for you. In our seven years here, Rachel and I have been blown away by the love that you have shown for one another. I've tried to make a list.

Here are a few. Whether it's meals cooked, offers to transport, offers to babysit, hospital visits, aged care visits, money given, a friend to talk to, praying with someone, just to name a few.

We might not be perfect, but I can tell you with confidence that you are not Cain. HCD is full of God's children. How do I know?

The evidence is everywhere. I have seven years of stories passed on to me of brothers and sisters passing the love test. Why?

[14 : 12] Because verse 18, you love not with or speak and in truth. You see, John is trying to build your confidence. He talks in big, broad categories so you can see whose family you belong to.

He presents the biggest hater and the biggest lover, Cain or Jesus, a murderer or a life giver.

They're massively different, polar opposites, so you can be clear who you are or which family you belong to.

Of course, we're not perfect. We need to be honest that our love could always be better, but the truth is we are nothing like Cain in this church. You see, 1 John is medicine for the nervous Christian.

It's a dose of confidence when you doubt your place with God. The rest of the verses, they do something really special. They teach us how to counsel our hearts, how to persuade our hearts when they're full of doubts and fears.

This is our last point. Look at verse 19 to 21 in your Bibles. 19 to 21. The repeated word here is heart. A heart at rest, verse 19.

[15:25] Verse 20, a heart that condemns. Verse 21, a heart that does not condemn. These verses are about your hearts and specifically how to counsel them.

And it's such an important discipline to learn because the passage today has such a high standard of love. Last week, it was such a serious approach to sin. It's easy for us to feel like failures when Jesus is the measuring stick.

What's more, there'll always be false teaching trying to throw us off course. Christian friends who have fallen away. Our church might shrink. Other churches might grow. We'll doubt whether we're on the right path.

We'll need to learn how to counsel our hearts. Verse 20, if our heart condemns us, we know that God is greater than our hearts and he knows everything.

The idea is my heart versus God's brain. The question, who knows more? Whose verdict is greater? My heart, which loves to remind me of my failures, or God's brain, which, verse 20, knows everything.

[16:33] You see, God knows the real you deep down in your heart. And so, in big, broad terms, do you want to help your brothers and sisters in Christ or would you rather hurt them?

Are you Jesus or are you Cain? We're not always perfect, but in big, broad terms, who are you really? You see, God knows. He knows the real you.

He says, you may think you're not a real Christian, but what about the time you prayed for that person? Or that time you knew they were struggling and so you just gave them a hug or you made them a meal.

What about the money you gave to that church in Moldova so they could buy a bus which ships out Ukrainian refugees? You may feel like a failure. God says, I know the real you are inside your heart. Verse 19 says, you're to set your heart at rest, which means you're to persuade your heart to give it a good talking to. The goal is confidence.

[17:35] That is, a heart at rest. The way to get there is by persuading your doubts into submission. You see, despite our failures, from God's point of view, there's no doubt about you.

Verse 13, do not be surprised if the world hates you. Why? Because you are able. You are not Cain. The world always hates righteous people. Verse 14, you have passed from death to life.

Verse 16, Jesus laid his life down for you. Verse 19, this is how we know we belong to the truth. Verse 24, he gave us his spirit. We counsel our hearts by giving it a good talking to.

You line up all your doubts and fears on one side against God's verdict on the other and you ask yourself, who knows more? Whose verdict is greater? And the idea is that you learn how to persuade and counsel your doubts into the ground.

Wouldn't that be a great discipline for the rest of your Christian life? Learning how to counsel your doubting hearts, how to reassure yourself despite your failures of whose family you really are in, that you are able, that you are not Cain.

[18:52] See, verse 21 is the goal, a heart that does not condemn us, that is confident before God, so much so that we could ask him anything and he would give it to us.

But you get to that place by doing verse 20, persuading your heart, giving it a good talking to. The remaining verses, they're just a final flourish of confidence for the doubting Christian.

Verse 22, we keep his commands, we do what pleases him. That's the sin test. Verse 23, to believe in the name of his son, Jesus Christ, that's the belief test, the love test, to love one another as he commanded us, that's the love test.

Sin, belief, love, the three tests, John wraps them up as one, only they're not tests, are they? The way you pass your way up to God, they're actually evidence, evidence that you're already in the family.

You see, if a person kept God's commands, if they worked hard at the battle with sin, if they believed in Jesus and tried to love brothers and sisters, what does that say about them?

[20:03] John thinks it's pretty good evidence that they're a Christian, that they're members of God's family, that they're one of his children, that they love Jesus.

Verse 24, that they live in him and he in us. And this is how we know that he lives in us. We know it by the spirit he gave us. More about the spirit in two weeks.

Let me pray. Father God, we're so grateful for the Lord Jesus who loved us so much that he laid his life down for us.

Please, Father, would we love people, love each other like that, sacrificially? Help us to see if we can see brothers or sisters who need the stuff that we own.

And please, would we love them more? Father, thank you that you are a gracious God. We know that we're not perfect, but thank you for the reassurance that we are nothing like Cain.

[21 : 07] Thank you that you see deep into our hearts that you know we'd rather help people than hurt them. Father, please teach us to counsel our heart, to persuade our doubts into the ground.

We ask it for Jesus' sake. Amen.