

"Love one another"

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- [0 : 0 0] Well, friends, would you turn with me to the book of 1 John? 1 John, we're looking at chapter 3, verses 10 through 24 today. That's page 960 in the Pew Bible.
- John chapter 3, verses 10 through 24, page 960. We'll have it on the screen so as I read it the first time, but it'll be good to have it open as we continue to meditate on this passage today. As we come to God's Word, let me pray for us.
- Our Father in heaven, what a wonderful and needed reminder it is that it is you who has a hold on us long before we ever took hold of you.
- God, your love is always the first love in our lives. It always precedes any love that we respond and give back to you, and that is a great comfort and a great joy.
- So, Lord, as we approach your Word this morning, help us to see your Word as just another sign of your first love for us and help us to receive it by your Spirit and help us to live it out in his power.
- [1 : 1 1] For Jesus' sake, amen. All right, 1 John chapter 3, verses 10 through 24. By this it is evident who are the children of God and who are the children of the devil.
- Whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is the one who does not love his brother. For this is the message you have heard from the beginning, that we should love one another.
- We should not be like Cain, who was of the evil one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his own deeds were evil and his brother's righteous. Do not be surprised, brothers, that the world hates you.
- We know that we have passed out of death into life because we love the brothers. Whoever does not love abides in death. Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him.
- By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers. If anyone has the world's good and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him?
- [2 : 2 5] Little children, let us not love in word or talk, but in deed and in truth. By this we shall know that we are of the truth and reassure our heart before him.
- For whenever our heart condemns us, God is greater than our heart, and he knows everything. Beloved, if our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence before God, and whatever we ask, we receive from him because we keep his commandments and do what pleases him.
- And this is his commandment, that we believe in the name of his son, Jesus Christ, and love one another, just as he has commanded us. Whoever keeps his commandments abides in God and God in him, and by this we know that he abides in us by the Spirit whom he has given us.
- All right. Well, as we've seen this summer, 1 John, as a book, in its own sort of evolving, sort of elliptical way, presents three ways or three kind of signs that are evident, three things that are evident in someone or in a church that has genuine faith in Christ.

And those three signs that John describes are doctrine, obedience, and love. In other words, doctrine, believing the truth about Jesus' person and work, that's one sign.

[3 : 42] Obedience, a willing to follow God's commands, that's the second. And love. Do you love your brothers and sisters in Christ? Now, it's important to note that those three things that John talks about, they don't make you a Christian.

It's not as if doing those things will earn you favor with God. No. It's more like the fruit of a tree. Those things are kind of the evidence. They're the outgrowth. They're the things that show that you've come through the gospel to really receive God's love and favor and be born again in Him.

These three things are a bit like a three-legged stool. And if you're missing one of them, what happens? If you have a three-legged stool with two legs, it falls over, right? It doesn't stand.

Think about it. Obedience and love without believing that Jesus is the Christ, well, that's not much more than just kind of moralistic deism, right? Or if you have love and belief without obedience, well, that's what we call antinomianism.

You just do whatever you want. But belief and obedience without love, you see, that also falls over. Because belief and obedience without love is just a cold and joyless, dry legalism.

[5 : 02] So in this book, John wants to commend all three as a whole picture of what genuine spirituality looks like. And here in our text today, we're looking at that third leg of the stool.

We're looking at love. And John's big idea here, you see it in verse 10 and in verse 11, is that true Christians must love one another. Brotherly love, that is love for one's fellow brothers and sisters in Christ, brotherly love is an essential mark of genuine Christianity.

A Christian who doesn't love the brothers is no Christian at all, John says. Now, John's going to unpack this in this passage in four ways. And we're going to look at those four things as we sort of unpack this third critical leg of the stool.

First, John talks about the necessity of brotherly love, the necessity of it. And we see this in verses 12 through 15. John brings before us the negative example of Cain.

Now, you probably remember the story of Cain and Abel from Genesis 4. You know, if you've ever tried reading through the Bible in the whole year, you know, you probably at least got to Genesis 4 before you petered out somewhere in Leviticus, right?

[6 : 12] You know, so you remember Cain and Abel. Cain and Abel were the very first brothers in the Bible. And what happens? They grow up, and in the course of time, they both offer sacrifices to God, but we're told that God accepts Abel's sacrifice, but he does not accept Cain's.

Now, Genesis 4 doesn't seem to tell us why Cain's sacrifice wasn't accepted, but the Apostle John here in our text tells us that Cain's deeds were evil and his brother Abel's righteous.

If you go to the book of Hebrews in the New Testament, chapter 11, verse 4, it suggests something similar. We're told there that Abel offered his sacrifice in faith, that is, out of love and trust for God, and presumably Cain did not.

So it would seem then, as we put these pieces together, that God doesn't accept Cain's sacrifice then, because in this instance, Cain's outward religious actions, his sacrifice, as it were, that outward religious action, wasn't matched by an inward heart of love and obedience towards God.

Rather, Cain's life was marked by unrighteousness and a lack of inward trust in God. So God doesn't accept his sacrifice. It reminds us of what God will say through the prophet Isaiah many years later, seeing the same problem in the people of Israel at the time of Isaiah.

[7 : 35] He says, this people honors me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. So Cain, it seems, was honoring God with his lips, with an outward sacrifice, but his heart was far from God.

And how did Cain respond to all this? Well, in Genesis 4, we see that God pleads with Cain. God comes to him and calls him to repentance. He warns him. He says, Cain, this is not the path.

This is a path that leads to death. But instead of responding to God in repentance and in faith, Cain grows angry and jealous and bitter. And he calls his younger brother Abel out into the field and he strikes him down.

He murders him. Now, coming back to 1 John, we might think this example of Cain is pretty extreme, right? I mean, not many of us here have probably murdered someone.

But John, you see, the Apostle John, he wants us to look at the heart. Look at the end of verses 14 and verse 15 in this paragraph. Whoever does not love abides in death.

[8 : 42] And whoever hates his brother is a murderer. And you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him. John wants us to look at the heart here. And he also wants us to realize that, you know, there's no neutral ground in the spiritual life.

Well, you know, we like to think, we like to think that there's kind of plenty of neutral ground in the spiritual life. You know, on the one hand, there are these really awful, murderous people over there like Cain. And then there are these really amazing, loving people over there like Mother Teresa or whoever.

And then the rest of us are just kind of neutral. We're in the middle. We're neither all that good or all that bad. But you know, that's not how the Bible depicts the spiritual life. The Bible doesn't say there's any neutral ground.

You either abide in the house of love and life or you abide in the house of hatred and death. And without love, John says, you're not living in neutrality.

You're living in the house of death, of hatred, and yes, even murder. Remember what the Apostle Paul says to the Corinthian church in 1 Corinthians 13, 1 through 3.

[9 : 50] He says, if I speak in the tongues of men and of angels but have not love, I'm a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. And if I have prophetic powers and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith so as to remove mountains but have not love, I'm nothing.

If I give away all I have and if I deliver up my body to be burned but have not love, I gain nothing. Now we're familiar with that passage, right? 1 Corinthians 13.

We've heard it read at weddings and things like that. I remember a friend of mine in Australia, Australia, not a very Christianized place, right? He had a friend who was asked to read 1 Corinthians 13 at a wedding but he read 1 Chronicles 13 instead.

That must have been a great wedding. But anyway, 1 Corinthians 13. It's not just this sort of fluffy passage, right? There's actually an edge to it. Without love, we're nothing.

Like Cain, we can offer up religious externals and these externals might look wonderful or powerful or even significant but without love, we gain nothing.

[10 : 58] We are nothing. And you know what was happening at the church in Corinth that didn't have love? Jealousy, bitterness, animosity, hatred. These things were growing like wildfire.

And as a result, the church was dying. Why? Because jealousy, bitterness, animosity, hatred, you know, externally, those things might sort of look or actually be a mile away from murder.

But internally, in the heart, they're one and the same. Isn't this what Jesus himself taught in the Sermon on the Mount? Matthew 5. Jesus says, You've heard that it was said of old, you shall not murder and whoever murders will be liable to judgment.

But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment. Whoever insults his brother will be liable to the council. And whoever says, You fool, that is despising them in your heart, will be liable to the hell of fire.

So for our Lord Jesus, hatred, animosity, contempt, these things were all tantamount to murder in the heart. Without love, we abide in death.

[12 : 11] Love is the necessary mark of real Christianity. It has to be there. Now, there are two ways we can apply this point about the necessity of love as John presents it here.

And I think the first way we need to apply it is through self-examination. Friends, outward show is no evidence of inward transformation. Cain and Abel offered very similar sacrifices externally.

One brought livestock, the other brought produce from the field, but that's not what made one acceptable and the other unacceptable. Because you know, in the rest of the Old Testament, God commands both animals and produce to be brought as sacrifices.

So both Cain and Abel looked externally religious, spiritual, worshipful. Both of them came to the house of the Lord as it were, but only one of those two brothers was living or abiding in the house of eternal life.

The other one was abiding and living in the house of death. Both in the house of the Lord, but both living in very different houses spiritually. How about you, friend?

[13 : 23] You've come to the house of the Lord today. You've sung songs. You've prayed prayers. You've heard the Bible read. You're now hearing God's Word preached. But these external actions on your part do not necessarily mean that you have eternal life living in you.

These external actions are certainly important, even wonderful things to do. They're not to be despised or neglected, but they are not certain evidence that you are in a saving relationship with Christ.

Christ. In Matthew 7, Jesus even says this. He says, On that day, many will say to me, Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name and cast out demons in your name and do many mighty works in your name?

Then Jesus says, I will declare to them, I never knew you. Depart from me, you workers of lawlessness. You see what the Lord is saying?

The external religious acts, even seemingly miraculous deeds are not certain evidence of saving faith. There must be brotherly love.

[14 : 31] Love for one another in the family of God. That's the necessary sign. That's the necessary evidence. Friend, do you have that?

If not, then plead to God for mercy. Ask God for Christ's sake to forgive your sins. And to forgive your attempts at making yourself look good on the outside.

Ask God to make you new from the inside out. Jesus says, anyone who comes to me, I won't cast them out. Come to him and ask him to forgive your sins and receive him.

Now there's another way that John applies this first point about the necessity of brotherly love and we see it in verse 13. He writes, don't be surprised, brothers, that the world hates you. Now just as Abel was the target of Cain's hatred, bitterness, and jealousy, John's saying, so Christians shouldn't be surprised if we encounter the same sort of treatment today from those outside the faith.

And the truth is, we have to admit that while we do at times experience that sort of thing in the world, whether it be from coworkers or non-Christian family members or whatever it is, I think we also have to admit that there's a whole lot of the world inside the visible church too, right?

[15 : 53] Tragically, people who claim to be Christians can also be full of bitterness and jealousy and hatred. But brothers and sisters, don't be surprised. Don't be caught off guard.

This is the landscape of our fallen world. And John writes these words to comfort us and to prepare us when we experience these things. because he knows if we're not careful, if we are taken by surprise, then we too will be tempted to fall into bitterness and hatred ourselves.

So don't be surprised. Be prepared. Well, after telling us about the necessity of brotherly love, John goes on to show us the nature of brotherly love.

What does this sort of love look like? If it's essential that we have it, how do we recognize it in our lives? So this is John's second point, the nature of brotherly love, the nature. We see this in verses 16 through 18.

Verse 16, by this we know love, that he, that is Jesus, laid down his life for us and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers. So after the negative example of Cain, John now points us to the positive example of Christ.

[17 : 01] Cain was sort of the worst older brother in the entire Bible, right? And yet now he points us to Jesus, the true older brother. Christ who laid down his life shows us the nature of real, genuine love.

This is love that we lay down our lives for our fellow Christians. Now, of course, the love of Christ compels us to do good to everyone, like the good Samaritan on the road to Jericho who shows love to someone who culturally would have been considered his enemy, right?

Just like that good Samaritan, so we show love to everyone. Even those culturally, we might think they're our enemies or other people might think that we're enemies. We show love to everyone, but we do have a special regard and a special obligation and a special love for fellow believers.

The Apostle Paul captures this balance so well in Galatians 6.10. He writes, So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone and especially to those who are of the household of faith.

So what does this self-giving love look like? How is it expressed in everyday Christian living? And you know, here John is very down to earth.

[18 : 18] He doesn't want us to think that laying down our lives is something that only happens in extraordinary once-in-a-lifetime moments. No, look at how this should play out practically for us.

Look at what John says in verses 17 and 18. If anyone has the world's goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him? Little children, let us not love in word or talk, but in deed and in truth.

So here's the question John's answering, or here's the question John's asking. This is what self-giving love looks like. Do you share what you have with brothers and sisters in need?

Do you share what you have with brothers and sisters in need? I remember getting a phone call at the church office not too long ago from a church member and they were calling because they had a bunch of extra food in their pantry.

They were kind of cleaning it out and making some room and they gave the church office a call because they wanted to know who in the church might be in need, that they might give it to them. Now, on the surface that sounds really simple, right?

[19 : 26] Maybe even simplistic or too easy, right? Such a simple thing. But according to John, that's an example of real love. When we take the world's goods that we have, whether it's money or resources or influence, and when we see the real needs of our Christian brother or sister, and when we open our heart to meet that need with what we have.

Now, I wonder, did you want the apostle to give a more flashy explanation or application of self-giving love? Something more dramatic, more attention-getting, right?

But that's just it. This kind of love, it's not about being flashy or dramatic or extravagant or attention-grabbing. If that's what you're after, we're really just doing it for ourselves.

If we want something flashy or dramatic or extravagant or attention-grabbing, then aren't we just doing those things to look good or to feel good? No, real self-giving love lays down even that desire to be seen and admired for doing a great act of love.

Real self-giving love is self-forgetful. It's more tuned in to the real needs of the brother or sister right before me and how what God has given me might be used to meet that need.

[20 : 52] Well, if this is the nature of brotherly love, well, how do we go about putting it into practice then? Well, first, notice that John says we must be able to see our brother or sister in need.

We see them. In other words, we need to be in enough regular contact and relationship with fellow believers that we can actually identify, actually see what the needs are when they arise.

Practically, if you're able to and you don't regularly come to church on Sundays, if you're able to and you don't regularly fellowship with a small group or another smaller fellowship of church members, then it's going to be very difficult for you to love in the way John describes here.

Imagine I never sat down with my family at the dinner table to eat with them. Every night, I would stay in the office to work or watch TV or go for a walk, you know. I was just never present with them. Could I really say that I love them if I never sit down to be with them?

And can I know what's going on in that... Can I really know what's going on in their lives enough to really serve and love them? No. We have to be present to one another.

[22 : 09] Faithful church attendance matters. Faithful small group attendance matters. As an aside, this is one of the many reasons we practice formal church membership so we can actually know and identify with one another as brothers and sisters in the same spiritual family.

In membership, we're saying, I'm not just an attender. I'm not just a consumer. I'm a member of this family ready to serve and be served by my fellow brothers and sisters. So first, in order to practice brotherly love, we need to be present with each other so we can actually see each other's needs.

Second, we need to view our worldly goods as a means of blessing others. We need to look at our finances, for example, and ask, how much can I give to others in need?

The world wants us to push to the limits of our spending, right, so that we can have a certain lifestyle and that lifestyle is supposed to bring us joy, happiness, peace, and like nirvana on earth, you know.

But as Christians, we need to ask, what if I actually live a simpler lifestyle so that I can free up more of the resources God has entrusted to me to help my brothers and sisters in need?

[23 : 19] Now, we need to be careful not to judge one another in this matter, right? But this is a question we all need to be asking of ourselves. How can I be viewing my worldly goods not as things that I possess to use for my own ends, but as gifts to bless others?

As a church, we set aside money in our annual budget for this very reason. We have what's called the Deacon's Benevolence Fund, and that is money that we've set aside as a church family to give practically to those church members and church regular attenders and those who are in our midst to give to them to help meet practical, tangible needs as they arise.

And I know that many of you give generously to the Deacon's Benevolence Fund so that we can do that work more and more, and many people, probably more than you know, have been blessed very deeply through that generosity.

But you know, this doesn't just happen formally as a church family through the Deacon's Benevolence Fund. It can happen informally through all of us. As we hear about needs in our small group, as we learn about needs in our everyday relationships in the family of God, we can express the kind of love that John is describing here when we view whatever worldly goods we have not as something for our disposal, but as something God has entrusted to us that we might bless others.

And of course, this dynamic of identifying needs and giving generously, it doesn't just stay within the bounds of our local church, right? It extends globally. Just think of the missionaries that we support as a church.

[24 : 51] The Tidwells in South Asia serving in hospital work and healthcare there, meeting very practical needs. Our missionaries in Central Asia who were just visited a couple weeks ago, caring for persecuted believers in that part of the world.

Very real needs that they are seeking to meet. Even Greg and Kim King in Austria, who are doing work among Turkish immigrants in Vienna who recently were in need of housing, you know, as they continue their work of outreach.

That was a very real need and we as a church were able to give to that need. So this dynamic of seeing brothers and sisters in need, whether they're persecuted believers in Central Asia or missionaries in Vienna, seeking to use our worldly goods to meet that need, this dynamic that John's describing, it extends out from us globally.

So practically then, first, we need to be present enough to see the needs of our brothers and sisters and second, we need to view our worldly goods as a means to bless others. But there's a third thing, practically.

Look again at verse 17. John writes, if anyone has the world's goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him?

[26 : 10] The third thing we need practically then is an open heart, a heart that doesn't close, a heart that doesn't close whether out of fear or busyness or a critical, judgmental spirit.

We need hearts that are open, open to give, open to sacrifice. But what is it that opens our hearts in this way?

How do we get this opened heart? Well, John tells us here, doesn't he? It's the love of God for us. If God's love abides in us, then our hearts will open towards others.

And this brings us to the third big idea, main point of our passage. John showed us the necessity and the nature of brotherly love, but he also points us to the source of brotherly love, the source.

And we see it right here in the same paragraph we've been considering, verses 16 through 18, but especially in verse 16. By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us.

[27 : 17] You see, friends, Jesus Christ isn't just a moral example for us to follow. If your understanding of Jesus stops there, then you don't really understand who Jesus is or what he himself understood his mission to be.

If you only understand Jesus as a moral example, then you also don't really understand the love of God for you. Because Jesus didn't just come to show us how to live a loving life.

He didn't lay down his life merely as an example. No, John says Jesus laid down his life for us. When Jesus died, he accomplished something for us in our place that we could not accomplish.

Jesus himself put it this way in Mark 10, verse 45. He said, for the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many.

Did you catch that? Jesus says he didn't come to just give his life as an example for many but as a ransom for many.

[28 : 26] Now, what's a ransom? Well, a ransom is a payment, right, that sets you free. You see, friends, all of us, apart from Christ, we're enslaved in sin and in spiritual poverty.

We owe God a debt that we can't possibly pay and we stand condemned. but Christ came to pay our ransom, to make the payment to set us free.

The Apostle Paul put it this way in 2 Corinthians 8, 9. He said, for you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor so that you by his poverty might become rich.

the king of heaven, the only son of the Father in the splendor of eternity came to this earth in poverty.

He was born in a manger, right? I mean, mangers aren't like the cute things you see in nativity scenes, right? Like animals eat out of mangers, that's what they're for and that's where the king of the universe was born when he took on flesh for us.

[29 : 42] Jesus came to this earth in poverty and then he died a criminal's death on a cross in your place.

Why? So that we, through his poverty, might become spiritually rich. What are those spiritual riches that we gain through Christ's poverty?

The spiritual riches of having all of our sins forgiven, having a perfectly clean and clear conscience before God. The spiritual riches of being adopted into God's family to be beloved as a daughter, as a son, to be assured of the fatherly's favor, father's favor over us and for us all of our life.

The spiritual riches of being given a new heart, a new nature by the Holy Spirit to have new desires planted in us for life and joy and holiness. The spiritual riches of being given the indestructible promise of eternal life.

Friend, ask anyone on their deathbed if they would give all of their money and all of their wealth and all of their fame away to not face the abyss of death and what would they say?

[30 : 55] In a heartbeat. And yet, what has Christ given us? The spiritual riches of eternal life.

Through his poverty, you've become rich. And do you see now how much God loves you? He didn't just send his son as your example, but as your savior.

He paid the debt that you owed. He lavished his heavenly riches upon you when you didn't deserve it. He rose from the grave on the third day to prove that your debt of sin had been erased. Done!

And that the glories of heaven now belong to you and to everyone who will simply repent and believe in him. Friends, that, that is the source of brotherly love.

That is the thing that opens up our hearts when we see that his poverty has made us rich. When we see that we don't earn God's favor through showing brotherly love because we never could, right?

[32 : 02] But that God has freely given us his favor. You see, brotherly love is not what makes us a Christian. It's the other way around. No, we show brotherly love because we've been given God's favor freely by grace.

Brotherly love is not the cause of God loving us. It's the result of God's loving us. Brotherly love is the evidence that God's first love has taken hold of our hearts.

It's the evidence that the self-giving love of Jesus Christ has captivated us and transformed us and that we've given our life to him and his love. This source of brotherly love doesn't come from ourselves.

It comes from God and it comes from seeing with fresh eyes what Jesus has done for us, that he laid down his life for us. And the more you behold him in his self-giving glory, the more you behold him doing that for you, that's what opens your hearts.

That's what's going to open our hearts even when we're afraid or distracted or selfish because when we see how much Christ has loved us, well then friends, what do we have to fear? Why do I have to cling to this world's goods when I know what Christ has done for me?

[33 : 16] If he gave himself for me, if he gave his own self for me, will he not continue to take care of me? And so our hearts continue to open and then we are able to love just like he loved us.

So John tells us the necessity and the nature and the source of brotherly love. But lastly, he wants to tell us about the assurance of brotherly love, the assurance. And this is the last paragraph of our passage, verses 19 through 24.

You know, what sort of result in our lives comes about when we love in this way, when we're living in this kind of love in response to the gospel, what then is the dynamic in our lives?

Remember, John is writing this letter to a church that's troubled and doubting, right? They're wondering whether or not they have the real thing spiritually. And those troubles and doubts arose because a group had kind of broken off from their midst and began teaching that Jesus hadn't really come in the flesh and that the key to spirituality was secret knowledge that only they could give, right?

But John wants to come to this church and reassure them. He doesn't want them to believe those lies and to live in fear and doubt that they've missed the real thing. No, he wants them to live in joy and freedom and love and confidence that they do know God in Christ.

[34 : 34] So he writes this final paragraph here so that we might enjoy our relationship with God. Look at verse 19. By this, that is, by seeing the fruit of brotherly love in our hearts, we shall know we are of the truth and reassure our heart before Him.

And we see this evidence in our lives, as we see this evidence in our lives, it brings assurance. And that joyful assurance, it does three things, as John outlines here. First, he says it's a bulwark against self-condemnation.

Look at verse 20. Whenever our hearts condemn us, God is greater than our heart and He knows everything. You know, you might look at your life and not see much that's spectacular or dramatic.

You might not be a great teacher of flashy spiritual gifts. You might struggle to read the Bible. Prayer might not come naturally to you. And at times, your heart almost rises up against you condemning you.

How can you say you're a Christian? But John wants to come alongside of you as a loving pastor and say, no, no, no. You're looking in the wrong direction. What does God say is the mark of a genuine Christian?

[35 : 39] Flashy spiritual gifts? No. Ability to teach or memorize long passages of Scripture? No. Being able to hold all-night prayer vigils? No. What does God say? Verse 23, and this is His commandment, that we believe in the name of His Son, Jesus Christ, and love one another just as He has commanded us.

Are you trusting in Jesus and not yourself? Are you loving your brothers and sisters? That's what God says. And God is greater than your heart because God knows everything and your heart does not.

Last time I checked. So when the self-condemnation comes with standards and criteria that aren't in the Bible wanting to condemn you, look at Jesus. Trust in His love.

Then out of that love, love your brothers and sisters. That's the criteria. No more, no less. But this assurance isn't just a bulwark against self-condemnation.

It also, John says, brings wonderful confidence in prayer. Verse 21, Beloved, if our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence before God. And whatever we ask, we receive from Him because we keep His commandments and do what pleases Him.

[36 : 50] And this is His commandment that we believe in the name of His Son, Jesus Christ, and love one another just as He has commanded us. When you are secure in your relationship with God, when you have the assurance that comes from believing in Christ, something powerful happens.

Out of that assurance before God, you start to experience a wonderful freedom in prayer. That's what the word confidence means here. It's sort of freedom to draw near to God and ask Him whatever is on your heart.

It's like the clouds part, the sun shines through, your soul begins to open up, and like a flower opening to the skies, you just know that your Heavenly Father loves you and He delights to hear your prayers.

And so you go and you ask. And the more you ask, the more you find that God is answering your prayers. Why? Not because God is rewarding you for your obedience, but because your prayers start to be more and more in line with His will.

And so opening our hearts to the gospel and then letting the gospel open our hearts to love our brothers and sisters comes full circle and sends us back to God with renewed confidence and joy before Him in prayer. So John says this, brotherly love brings assurance.

[38 : 04] Assurance, that's a bulwark against self-condemnation, and it's increasing confidence in prayer. But lastly, he says this assurance doesn't just bring increasing confidence in prayer, but he says it brings richer communion with God.

Look again at the end of our passage. This is His commandment that we believe in the name of His Son, Jesus Christ, and love one another just as He has commanded us. Whoever keeps His commandments abides in God and God in Him.

And by this, we know that He abides in us by the Spirit whom He has given. This kind of assurance that John is talking about brings about a deeper experience of our loving relationship and communion with God that's honestly hard to put into words.

John says, we abide in God and God in us. Now that's true of every Christian. The mutual indwelling of the believer in God and shockingly, God in the believer.

That's true of every Christian. But do you and I really grasp that? Do you get a sense of that awesome communion that you have with God in Christ?

[39 : 15] Do you have a sense of that in your soul, in your heart? John says, that sense, that deep, awesome reality starts to become real as the Holy Spirit does His work.

by the Spirit whom He has given us. We start to know that He abides in us. And we know it not just intellectually, but in our affections from the heart. The Apostle Paul describes this work of the Spirit in Romans 8.

He says, you didn't receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear. You've received the spirit of adoption as sons by whom we cry, Abba, Father.

The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God. John was expressing something similar when at the beginning of chapter 3 in this book he wrote, Behold, what manner of love the Father has given to us that we should be called children of God and so we are.

You can almost hear the Apostle John saying, Abba, Father. We are in God and God is in us. Intimate, loving communion between God and His beloved children, you and me in Christ.

[40 : 34] This is what assurance brings, this deep experience of this reality of our communion with God. So the assurance of brotherly love, it silences self-condemnation, it opens the doors of confidence and prayer, and it deepens our experience of communion with God.

Friends, are these not great motivations? Are these not great things to long for and desire more of? Are these not great motivations for us to set our eyes on Jesus, to behold how much He has loved us, and then to turn and to love one another?

This is the message we've heard from the beginning, that we should love one another. Let's pray. Holy Spirit, would you come?

Shine the spotlight on the work of Jesus, transform our hearts, and let us taste this rich assurance that comes from knowing Christ and loving one another.

Lord, for those who have been troubled by this passage because they don't see the love of Christ in their hearts, Lord, would that not lead them to turn away from you, but to run toward you.

[41 : 53] Jesus, you say you stand at the door and you knock, and if we open, you will come in and eat with us, feast with us. So God, I pray that the opening of that door would be happening, that you would grant saving faith to those who are uncertain of where they stand with you, and let them leave today confident of your love for them in Jesus.

Amen.