

AUTHENTIC LOVE: THE EVIDENCE OF ETERNAL LIFE AND THE SOURCE OF CONFIDENCE BEFORE GOD.

Last week, Tim reminded us that John intentionally repeats three tests of authentic Christianity throughout his letter to the church. These tests include: a doctrinal test—having belief in the true gospel of Jesus Christ (2:22-23, 4:1-3, and 5:1,5, 10-12); a relational test—having true love for one another (2:9-11, 3:10-18, and 4:7-21); and a moral test—living a life with a trajectory of righteousness and obedience to the Word of God (2:3-6, 3:6-10, and 5:3). Love is a test of authentic Christianity.

A few weeks ago, Kurt did a great job of introducing us to the old commandment, the one that you have heard from the beginning—the commandment to love your brother, and not hate your brother. **“For whoever says he is in the light and hates his brother is still in darkness”** (1 John 2:9). Love is a commandment to be obeyed by genuine followers of Christ.

This morning we will further explore the relational test of love, by examining our love for one another. In today’s passage, 1 John 3:11-24, John says, **“We *know* that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brothers,”** (v.14) and, **“*By this* [referring to authentically loving one another] *we shall know that we are of the truth and reassure our heart before him,*”(v.19).**

If you are here this morning, and you confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, then you can have assurance of eternal life—assurance of your salvation—by testing your love for one another. Authentic love for one another is the evidence of eternal life and the source of confidence before God.

Many sincere believers wrestle with doubt, wondering, ‘Have I truly been born again?’ This morning, John writes that you may not doubt, but that you might *know* that you have eternal life, if you love one another.

Sinclair Ferguson defines assurance of salvation as such, “Assurance of salvation is the conscious confidence that you are in the right relationship with God through Christ. It is the confidence that you have been justified and accepted by God in Christ, regenerated by his Spirit, adopted into his family, and that through faith in Jesus Christ, you will be kept until the day of Christ’s return, when all things will be made new” (Ferguson, 30).

So, how can you *know* with confidence that you are abiding in Christ? Well, you need to examine your life for the elements of authentic, godly love for one another. So let’s think for a minute about how another type of test might be used to confirm the presence of physical life, so that we can better understand how John’s test— the test of loving one another— can be used to reassure us of spiritual life.

Suppose a woman comes into the clinic asking us to determine if she is pregnant, or not; the medical staff might begin with a few basic, exploratory questions: Are you nauseated frequently? Have you been fatigued recently? Have you noticed any unexpected weight gain, or mood swings, or food cravings? Have you missed a menstrual cycle? Affirming any of these symptoms are what we call presumptive signs of pregnancy. But merely having these symptoms lacks accuracy— the sensitivity and specificity— required to say, “Yes, you are definitely pregnant.” To be sure if this woman is *indeed* pregnant, she needs to be tested, whether it be a urine test, or a blood test, or an ultrasound. To truly confirm new life, doctors must turn to the best test, the gold standard, that provides the most confident result.

And just as doctors use reliable tests to confirm physical life, John gives us the definitive test for confirming spiritual life: love for one another.

Do you have eternal life? Are you saved? The exam begins...now. So, let's read John's letter, starting in chapter three, verse eleven.

1 John 3:11, “For this is the message that you have heard from the beginning, that we should love one another.”

John both opens, and closes, this section by exhorting us to love one another. THE COMMAND TO LOVE one another *is* the message that you have heard from the beginning. God's command to love one another is nothing new. John later wraps up this section by reminding us to *keep* God's commandment to both believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ, and to love one another— placing our belief in the Son of God, and our love for one another into an inseparable imperative. To love one another is both a matter of obedience to Christ and the Word of God; *and* a test of one's genuineness of faith. From the beginning, all who are born of God, are commanded to love one another. And from the beginning, those whom God calls, he commands to love one another and he makes capable of loving one another.

Most of our time this morning will be spent clearly defining the attributes of authentic, godly love, and providing practical examples of how that love can be worked out. But, by whose definition of 'love' should we test our lives? *The world* keeps using that word—love— but I do not think it means, what they think it means. Because love is spoken of, in so many unhelpful ways, *we* must speak of love as it is divinely revealed in scripture. It's only by knowing what authentic, biblical love is, that we can accurately test our lives, and *know* that we have eternal life.

But before spelling out what godly love looks like, John provides us with A CONTRAST OF LOVE. This is what a life absent of love looks like.

Verses twelve to fifteen read, **“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.**

Those who are like Cain abide in death, and have no eternal life abiding in them. Cain was a murderer and he was of the evil one. Church, we should not be like Cain. That sounds pretty simple. Well, to better grasp the depth of John's contrast, let us revisit the original story in Genesis chapter four, where Cain's failure to love led to murder.

In Genesis chapter four, it reads, **“Now Adam knew Eve his wife, and she conceived and bore Cain, saying, “I have gotten a man with the help of the Lord.” And again, she bore his brother Abel. Now Abel was a keeper of sheep, and Cain a worker of the ground. In the course of time Cain brought to the Lord an offering of the fruit of the ground, and Abel also brought of the firstborn of his flock and of their fat portions. And the Lord had regard for Abel and his offering, but for Cain and his offering he had no regard. So Cain was very angry, and his face fell. The Lord said to Cain, “Why are you angry, and why has your face fallen? If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin is crouching at the door. Its desire is for you, but you must rule over it.” Cain spoke with Abel his brother. And when they were in the field, Cain rose up against his**

brother Abel and killed him” (Genesis 4:1-8). And verse 16 says, after these things Cain went away from the presence of the LORD (Genesis 4:16a).

So, why did Cain murder Abel? It seems, no evil had been done to Cain. No one had wronged Cain. God seems to have no ill will toward Cain. *God simply tells him* to do what is right, and will he not be accepted?

Unlike, Genesis chapter three, where Satan shows up and tempts Adam and Eve to rebel against God. This time, there is no talking serpent; it's *as if* evil was at war *within* him. Something else was going on with Cain— something inside of him that spilled out in his murderous actions. James explains this inner conflict like this, “What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you? Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you? You desire and do not have, so you murder” (James 4:1-2). Why do sinful men hate and fight and quarrel and murder?

To quote the thriller, and science fiction author, Stephen King, “Monsters are real, and ghost are real too. They live inside us, and sometimes, they win.” And for Cain, the evil that was living and quarreling within him won. He was of the evil one, and his murderous thoughts and actions were a dark reflection of a heart that hated the light. His sinful heart was merely acting out it's evil desires. He had never passed from death to life. The simple answer to why Cain murdered his brother, was he was lost, and unregenerate. He had no eternal life abiding in him, only death. His hate for God, and murdering his brother, was simply an outpouring of his heart. And as my friends in Arkansas say, “What's down in the well, comes up in the bucket.” And, there was no hint of love for God, or his brother, to be found in Cain's well.

If you are saved, born of God, then your life should be *easily* distinguished— *easily* contrasted— with those who are not saved. John clearly contrasts true Christ-followers, those who walk in righteous deeds, by faith; against, the example of Cain. It was clear that the trajectory of Cain's life was not pointed in the way of love, and his destiny would not include eternal life. Our loving flowing out of a heart transformed by the gospel sets our lives apart from Cain's life and from the world. And we can find *assurance* in our salvation, when our lives do not look like the world.

A life that is marked by anger and hate for one's brother is one that has no assurance of eternal life. So, friend, if you find that your life is often characterized by hate and ruled by anger, you can put your pencil down, and you don't need to proceed any farther in this examination — you need a new heart. You need Christ, and he freely offers himself to you this morning. He has shed his blood for your sins on the cross, to purify you from anger and transfer you from death into eternal life. He is patient with you today, desiring to transform your hate into genuine love for one another. You don't need anger management classes. You need to repent and be born again. And those born of God, will no longer resemble Cain, but will resemble Christ in their relationships. If you do well, will you not be accepted?

Accepted by God that is.

The world will still hate you. I will not spend much time in verse thirteen, but John throws in an aside, telling those who follow Christ— *do not be surprised* that the world hates you. Love for both God, and the world, are incompatible, as Gordon preached a couple of weeks ago. If you belong to Christ, you will not love this world, *and* this world will *not* love you. Be assured of this, church, the world will hate you. This is nothing new to those who follow Jesus.

In the gospel of John 15:18-19, Jesus tells his followers, “If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own, but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you.”

So, do not be surprised when the Cains of this world hate you. Simply, continue to walk in the light, and continue to love one another. This is proof that you have passed from death into life.

Having seen what love *is not*, John now shows us what love truly is, starting in verses sixteen, seventeen and eighteen. If we are to find assurance of eternal life, by testing our lives, based on the criteria of our love for one another, wouldn't it be nice to know exactly what John means by “love?” So, he describes some CHARACTERISTICS OF AUTHENTIC LOVE that we ought to have for one another. He does not provide an exhaustive description of divine love, but he does give us four characteristics of true love that believers *ought* to have for one another. And these characteristics of genuine love are the standard by which we should measure our love for one another.

Verse sixteen. **“By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers. But 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.”**

How do we know love? **“By *this* we know love,”** John is about to tell us what *is* divine, genuine, godly love. We don't get define how we love one another. *This* is how biblical love for one another is revealed.

First, authentic **LOVE IS SACRIFICING**. We only know true love because Jesus laid down his life for us. Love was revealed to us when Christ laid down his life for us. John 15:13 says, **“Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends.”**

Sacrificing love is costly. Authentic love shown to us, in Christ, came at a greater cost than any love we can have for our brothers. For us men, and for our salvation, Jesus Christ came down from heaven, took on human flesh and became fully human. For our sake, he suffered, was crucified, and buried in a borrowed tomb. God valued the redemption of the elect so much that the begotten Son of God suffered humiliation and death on earth, so that all who now belong to Christ may be exalted in heaven. It was at great cost, that the love of God provided a Savior (Charnock, 1184). Christ’s suffering and dying is the demonstration of authentic, sacrificing love.

And sacrificial love is not only costly— it’s voluntary. **John 10:17-18, “For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life that I may take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again.”** Christ owed man no debt that he should lay down his life for sinners, such as you and me. God voluntarily blesses us by his divine favor. And the love the church displays ought to be voluntary also. The love that God poured out on us, through the blood of his only Son was a costly, and voluntary act. **“And we *ought* to lay down our lives for the brothers”** (1 John 3:16b). If our love for one another is less than sacrificial—costly and voluntary—then it’s something other than godly love.

When you are examining your life for signs of love, do you find hints of sacrificial love in your life? Or, when you express love, do you expect to get something greater back in return? Would you describe your love for one another as costly or voluntary? Would *others* describe

your love as sacrificing? This *is* love— that Christ laid down his life for us... and *we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers*.

In verse seventeen, John also launches into a greater-to-lesser argument concerning our sacrificial love, arguing that: *If* you follow Christ's example of sacrificial love, *then* you ought also to be willing to give your life for your fellow believers—and if you're willing to lay down your life for your brother, then surely, you should be quick to embrace less sacrificial forms of loving one another, such as sharing in your material possessions (Culy, 87).

So, *how much more* should we love one another when the price of loving one another is *less costly* than dying for one another? Church, you might naturally consider giving money, this world's goods, to meet the material needs of others as the primary way we can demonstrate sacrificial love for one another— since dying for your brother is both a rare opportunity, and self-limiting one. But, let me suggest that sacrificial love may require you to give less of your wallet, and give *much more of yourself* than you realize— your time, your attention, and your heart. It's often in these non-monetary ways that we are *not* sacrificial in our love. Authentic sacrificial love might be more difficult than giving money (Bridges, 206).

Do you voluntarily give of your time for the needs of others? Does your love for one another cost you anything? If your love for one another is not a sacrificing love, should it concern you?

Let's look at verses seventeen and eighteen again for the next characteristic of godly love. **"But 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?" (1 John 3:17).**

In addition to being a sacrificing love, AUTHENTIC LOVE IS A SEEING LOVE. True love for one another is characterized as a love that *sees a brother in need*. God's love sees with an outward gaze. God in the Old Testament is a God who sees. And in the New Testament, how many times is Christ described as one *seeing* and having compassion. It was when Jesus *saw* Mary, and the Jews weeping at the death of his friend Lazarus, that he was deeply moved within his spirit. He *saw* the widow at Nain who had just lost her only son and was moved with compassion. It was when he *saw* the faith of the friends of the paralytic that he forgave his sins and healed his body. Jesus looked up into a sycamore tree and *saw* a needy, wee little man.

The kind of love that sets believers apart from the world requires *seeing* a brother in need. And John is not describing an overwhelming love for the entire world that loves the world generally, but loves no one particularly. John has moved to us seeing "*a brother*" in need— one person, in our line of sight, who is clearly in need. Love *sees that* person and their need. It's hard to love one people when you don't *see* them. If we are not regularly present with one another, we cannot clearly *see* one another's need. In 2022, the North American Mission Board reported that 54% of evangelicals believed worshipping alone, or with family, could replace going to church (NAMB State of Theology Study, 2022). Church it's hard to love one another, if you never assemble with one another.

Think of social media, where we are separated by space *and* time, and how we substitute *seeing* one another. Do you clearly see your brother's needs on social media? Quite the opposite. We see how strong and independent everyone is. Everyone seeks to have it 'all together' online. We are more excited about showing off our worldly goods, than seeing ways we can help our

brother out with those goods. Our sight is often skewed enough in person, but even more so, when we are not present with one another.

It's hard to see each other's needs, as Christ sees our needs, when we only come together for a couple hours each week. So when you spend time with one another, is it having needed spiritual conversations, or discussing sports, the weather or politics? Are you willing to pay the price to be *present with one another*, and to actively listen to one another for '*hints*' of needs, when they are not explicitly asking for help? Do you *see* your brother in need?

If we ought to *love* as *God loves*, then we must learn to *see* as God sees. By the help of the Spirit, and the enlightenment of God's word, we must train our spiritual eyes to "*see*" one another's needs, as Christ *sees* them. If you claim to love one another, but your love rarely sees a brother in need, you should be concerned.

But seeing a need isn't enough either. Godly love also feels the weight of that brother's need—responding not with indifference, but with compassion. Love, John says, not only *sees* others and their needs, but love responds with a sensitive heart, *not* with a begrudging heart. AUTHENTIC LOVE IS A SENSING LOVE. Once again this is no new characteristic of God's love. More than once in the Gospels, Christ revealed his heart for those in need. Christ often gravitated toward those of great need. He often showed compassion to the most needy. Can you recall the story in the Gospels where Jesus saw someone in need, and then closed his heart toward them? Neither can I.

Christ cannot act in any other way, than with a sensitive love. Christ fulfills the law, written in Deuteronomy 15, which I'll paraphrase—If among you, one of your brothers should become poor, in any of your towns within your land that the LORD your God is giving you, *you*

shall not harden your heart, or shut your hand against your poor brother, but you shall open your hand to him, and lend him sufficient for his need, *whatever* it may be. Take care lest there be an unworthy *thought in your heart*... and your eye look grudgingly on your poor brother, and you give him nothing... [but instead] you shall give to him freely, and your heart shall not be grudging when you give to him.

Do you see it? Godly love is characterized by a heart is not hardened against a needy brother. It does not feel unworthy thoughts, nor look grudgingly at a needy brother. John pointedly asks, **“But 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? (1 John 3:17).** How does God’s love abide in him? It doesn’t! God’s love doesn’t abide in anyone who closes his heart against his brother’s needs. What’s in your heart, is evidenced by your actions. Do you want assurance of eternal life? Then ask yourself, does your heart respond to the needs of others with a Christ-like love, or with something less?

How are we good at closing our hearts to brothers we see in need? How does your heart deceive you into thinking you really love your brother in need, but in reality your actions prove otherwise? A couple of weeks ago in CONNECT, we discussed what hating our brother might look like— our lack of love for one another often shows up as indifference. We simply disengage from others. We become apathetic. We might *see* a brother in need, but we pretend not to notice, and our hearts are not stirred at all. If this is *often* your response, then *please*, closely examine your heart for other signs of eternal life.

Other ways we close our heart against our brothers are: we minimize a brother’s need, responding by scoffing, or with cynicism. We say in our heart, “Oh, it’s not that serious.” Or we

reason in our heart that someone else is better prepared to meet our brother's need. We might judge, or blame, a brother for being in need, saying, "it's their own fault." We respond by being selfish, rather than sensitive. We prioritize our own comfort, over compassion, because loving them as Christ loves them, extracts a price that our flesh is unwilling to pay. *Our* "love" language often sounds like indifference, rather than the vulnerability and sensitivity of a sensing love. This is not authentic love.

In Luke 10, do you remember the parable of the Good Samaritan? Do you remember the response of the priest and the Levite when they *saw* the man who had been robbed, stripped, beaten and left for dead? Both the priest and the Levite *saw* him... and *they* passed on the other side. It was only the Samaritan who *saw* the beaten man in need, and *had compassion*. If we have passed from death unto life, then our love for one another *must* be characterized as a love that opens our heart toward a brother's need, not closes our heart against him. We must love one another as Christ has loved us— with a sacrificing, seeing and sensing love.

And the final mark of a Christ-like love is that AUTHENTIC LOVE IS A SERVING LOVE. Verse 18 says, "**Little children, let us not love in word or talk, but in deed and in truth**" (1 John 3:18). It is easy to feel a sentiment, and *call* it love, yet fail to perform any meaningful acts of love (Yarborough, 205). But *a serving* love is modeled after our serving savior. Mark 10:45 says, "**For even the Son of Man came not to be served, but to serve...**" Godly love for one another responds with deeds— with actions— not merely with an open mouth, or with social media posts, or Tweets— but in deeds and truth. Aren't you glad that Jesus's love language didn't stop at words of affirmation? Love requires action and engagement.

If godly love was a movie, it would contain romantic elements, but it would primarily be an action movie.

Authentic love acts— and it acts in ways that are personal, practical, present, and visible. If we claim to have faith in Christ, but refuse to help someone in need, then James tells us that our faith is dead and useless (James 2:15-17). It is impossible to have God’s love abiding in you, without it overflowing in acts of mercy toward those in need—and *even more so* toward your fellow saints in need. Paul tells us in Galatians 6:10 to do good for all, but even *greater good* for the brothers, **“So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith.”**

If you profess to believe in Jesus, and you confess to abide in Christ— you ought to know the difference of loving one another in word alone, and loving one another with deeds; because greater assurance of your salvation is given to you, when your faith is evidenced by loving one another with deeds.

And since authentic love isn’t abstract— it’s personal, practical, present and visible. Let me give you a few suggestions of what a love that serves might look like. I’m confident you can expand this list next week in your CONNECT class.

First, you can serve your fellow church members who are in physical need, *obviously* by sharing some of your worldly goods. You should be willing to provide for your brother’s material needs at a sacrificial level. This *might* be by giving financially. It *might* mean cooking a meal, or buying some groceries for those recovering from surgery or illness. You might help someone run errands, or provide transportation for a brother going through a rough patch financially. You

might babysit for parents who need a little help. And, you can always give to the benevolence ministry here at First Baptist Nixa.

However, you can also serve one in non-financial ways—demonstrating your love through practical service that embodies authentic love and commitment.

How about serving one another's needs by being present with one another? Come to church—regularly attend Sunday worship and CONNECT class. Actively engage in discussions. Show up early at the cost of some sleep. Stay late, but not too late... or Rance will run you out of the building. Serve the church by fostering community— having game nights, sharing meals, hosting book clubs, or mom's groups. Invite others into your circles— especially when it costs you comfort. Sacrifice, see, sense and serve. This is the *action part* of a love.

You can also *speak* encouragement and truth to one another. Encourage and affirm one another. Express gratitude for one another. Discuss spiritual matters with truth and grace, including areas of growth and accountability. Discuss your challenges of faith with one another. Be sharing your testimony *often* with one another. Be praying for one another— and, not from afar— but out loud, with one another. Address disagreements directly, and lovingly seek reconciliation that honors God and preserves relationships. Love by serving as a peacemaker within our church.

Loving one another in practical ways helps us mature and move closer to Christ. Read scripture with one another. Mentor and disciple new believers. Offer spiritual wisdom and direction. Walk with others who are struggling in their faith.

If you can't think of any *active* ways to love one another by serving one another, then look no further than our Membership Covenant. Start by refreshing your memory, remembering

how you have committed to loving one another in your church, not in word and talk alone, but in deed and in truth.

And when you find yourself doing these things— when you find yourself sacrificially serving one another. When you find yourself seeing one another's needs. When your heart is filled with compassion for your brother, and your hand is more frequently opened to loving your brother with actions, rather than with mere words, then *be confident* that this type of love— authentic, godly love—is working in you. You can *know* that you are of the truth, and your heart can be reassured that you have passed from death into eternal life. The authentic love in your life will lead to assurance of salvation that is the source of confidence before God.

AUTHENTIC LOVE IS THE SOURCE OF CONFIDENCE BEFORE GOD.

Verses 19-24, **“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.”**

John tells us where shall we find reassurance— “by this we shall know” that we are of the truth and reassure our heart before God. “By this,” he means that sacrificial, seeing, sensing and serving love I just spoke about. It is by your practical, visible expressions of love for one another that *you shall know* that you are of the truth. Your love in action is an outward sign of

your inward change, that gives you a divine confidence that will prompt you to pray and to abide in Christ. Authentic love gives you confidence before God.

However, verse twenty serves as stern warning against the meanness of the heart, which objects to our confidence before God. Your heart will attempt to condemn you for having a love that often falls short. And here is the tension: you should be *encouraged* and *reassured* when you see outward signs of the Holy Spirit's work in your life— *but*— you will also be all the more conscious when your love for one another falls short. And *if* you rely on your heart to judge the quality and quantity of your love for one another, then you will be robbed of your assurance of salvation.

Some tender believers fail to understand the continuing presence of indwelling sin in their lives. This might be you. When your conscience condemns you, and your assurance wanes, *it might appear that* your conscience holds a veto power over God's promises of assurance. You might reason that your love for one another is less than what it should be— *and that is the case for all of us this side of heaven*. We will fail to have a love that is always sacrificing, always seeing, always sensing, and always serving. So, our heart produces accusation, instead of assurance. Our natural heart generates condemnation instead of confidence.

So, when your heart is weighed down with conviction and condemnation, don't look deeper into your heart for assurance— *turn* and look outward and upward to God for your evidence of assurance (Yarborough, 211).

Think back to chapter two, when John said, **“My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin... BUT... if anyone does sin, we have an advocate**

with the Father, Jesus Christ, the righteous.” In a similar manner, John tells that that *when* our heart condemns us for not loving perfectly, *have confidence*, God is greater than our hearts.

Here's God's promise to you, when your heart condemns you— **God is greater than your heart, and he knows everything. Beloved, if our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence before God”** (1 John 3:20-21). Your grounds of assurance are found in the promises of God, who knows you and is greater than the feeble, fickle, fallible feelings of your heart. Beloved, God *seeks* to give you comfort and confidence, not condemnation. “There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus” (Romans 8:1).

And in verse, 22, *now that we have confidence before God*, we discover that our confidence has a purpose. Merely being confident in one's salvation is not the end for John. Our confidence points us to prayer.

Think about this... when I love you with authentic, godly love... and you love me with authentic, godly love... when we love one another... it gives *us all* confidence to approach God in prayer. *Our* prayers will be motivated by what pleases God. We will all say, “Thy will be done.” And God, our heavenly Father gives *good* gifts to those who ask. And you can confidently ask! So, let us all love one another, so we can all pray together, asking and receiving, with the full assurance of faith (Hebrews 10:19-22).

And in verses twenty-three and twenty-four, we return to the commandment that we have heard from the beginning—both believing in the name of Jesus Christ, and loving one another. Don't see this commandment as two distinct commands— one to believe, and one to love one another. Believing in Christ and loving one another are inseparable from one another.

The assurance that we possess when we believe in Jesus and when we love one another leads unto into confidently communing with God. Verse 24, whoever keeps his commandments abides in God.

Assurance of salvation, given to our hearts by God, evidenced by our love for one another ushers us into communion with the Triune God. So, with confidence, let us enter into the presence of God, through the blood of Christ. Our obedience— loving Jesus and loving one another is evidence that we abide in God and God abides in us. And if that's not enough, by this we know that he abides in us— by the Spirit whom he has given us. The Spirit's testifies to our spirit, and *we can know* that we are indeed sons of God (Beeke, 199). Romans 8:16 says, "The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God." Our assurance of salvation and our confidence before God does not arrive from mere intellectual reasoning. The work of the Holy Spirit, gives you assurance of eternal life, and He enables you to live in obedience to God's commands.

If you lack assurance this morning, you should seek it diligently, by examining your love for one another in the light of God's Word, and with the help of His Spirit (Beeke, 23). Test yourself today, according to what is written in God's Word. We do not love one another to earn God's favor. We love because he first loved us. Our love is not the grounds of our salvation— but it is the fruit of it. And the fruit might be small or immature, but it's present. Do you see signs of the Spirit working in your life? Then take heart, that one day your love will be made complete, when you see Jesus face to face.

So church, as you go out this week, test your love— not with discouragement, but with hope. Look for signs of authentic love. And when you see that small, but growing, sacrificing,

seeing, sensing and serving love— take heart! For by this you shall *know* that you are of the truth and you can reassure your heart before God. Let that assurance carry you into prayer, into communion, and into a life of joyful obedience. Let's pray.

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OUTLINE

1 JOHN 3:11-24

AUTHENTIC LOVE: THE EVIDENCE OF ETERNAL LIFE AND THE SOURCE OF CONFIDENCE BEFORE GOD

PURPOSE STATEMENT: *Those who believe in Jesus Christ can have assurance of salvation by testing their authentic love for one another. Authentic love for one another is the evidence of eternal life and the source of confidence before God.*

- A. LOVE IS COMMANDED (v. 11)
- B. LOVE IS CONTRASTED (vv. 12-15) (in the example of Cain)
- C. LOVE IS CHARACTERIZED (vv. 16-18) (in the example of Christ)
 - 1. Authentic love is sacrificing (v. 16)
 - 2. Authentic love is seeing (v.17)
 - 3. Authentic love is sensing (v.17)
 - 4. Authentic love is serving (v.18)
- D. AUTHENTIC LOVE IS THE SOURCE OF CONFIDENCE BEFORE GOD (vv. 19-24)
 - A. Confidence leads to prayer
 - B. Confidence leads to abiding