

THAT YOU MAY
KNOW

A STUDY OF FIRST JOHN

“Assurance and
the Lifestyle
of Love”

1 John 3:11-24



“The Murder of Abel”
by Gustave Doré (1832–1883)

Genesis 4:1–10

“Assurance and the Lifestyle of Love” – 1 John 3:11–24

“For this is the message which you have heard from the beginning, that we should love one another; not as Cain, *who* was of the evil one and slew his brother. And for what reason did he slay him? Because his deeds were evil, and his brother’s were righteous. Do not be surprised, brethren, if the world hates you. We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brethren. He who 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. We know love by this, that He laid down His life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. But whoever has the world’s goods, and sees his brother in need and closes his heart against him, how does the love of God abide in him? Little children, let us not love with word or with tongue, but in deed and truth. . . .

“We will know by this that we are of the truth, and will assure our heart before Him in whatever our heart condemns us; for God is greater than our heart and knows all things. 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 the things that are pleasing in His sight. This is His commandment, that we believe in the name of His Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, just as He commanded us. The one who keeps His commandments abides in Him, and He in him. We know by this that He abides in us, by the Spirit whom He has given us.”



I. The Necessity of Love Asserted

1 John 3:11

“This is the message which you have heard from the beginning, that we should love one another.”

“**For** this is the message **which you have heard from the beginning,**
that we should love one another” (3:11).

- “**For**” – connects to the assertion of v. 10 – “By this the children of God and the children of the devil are obvious: anyone who does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor the one who does not love his brother.”
- “**Which you have heard from the beginning**” – from the moment of their conversion; emphasizes the message’s *unchanging nature* and its *essential priority* in the Christian life.
- “**Love one another**” – a continuous pattern of life, wherein members of the church mutually seek the welfare of each other; to be characteristic of *all believers without exception*—even John himself (“we”).

“A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.”

—John 13:34–35

“This is My commandment, that you love one another, just as I have loved you.”

—John 15:12

“This I command you, that you love one another.”

—John 15:17

Men of the Word

“Beloved, I am not writing a new commandment to you, but an old commandment which you have had from the beginning; the old commandment is the word which you have heard. On the other hand, I am writing a new commandment to you, which is true in Him and in you, because the darkness is passing away and the true Light is already shining. The one who says he is in the Light and *yet* hates his brother is in the darkness until now. The one who loves his brother abides in the Light and there is no cause for stumbling in him. But the one who hates his brother is in the darkness and walks in the darkness, and does not know where he is going because the darkness has blinded his eyes.”

—1 John 2:7-11

Men of the Word

Biblical love is “not natural affection stimulated by the loveliness of the one loved but a high ethical love which consistently seeks the true welfare of those loved. Fallen human nature is selfish and resists any claims on its time that conflicts with those of self.”

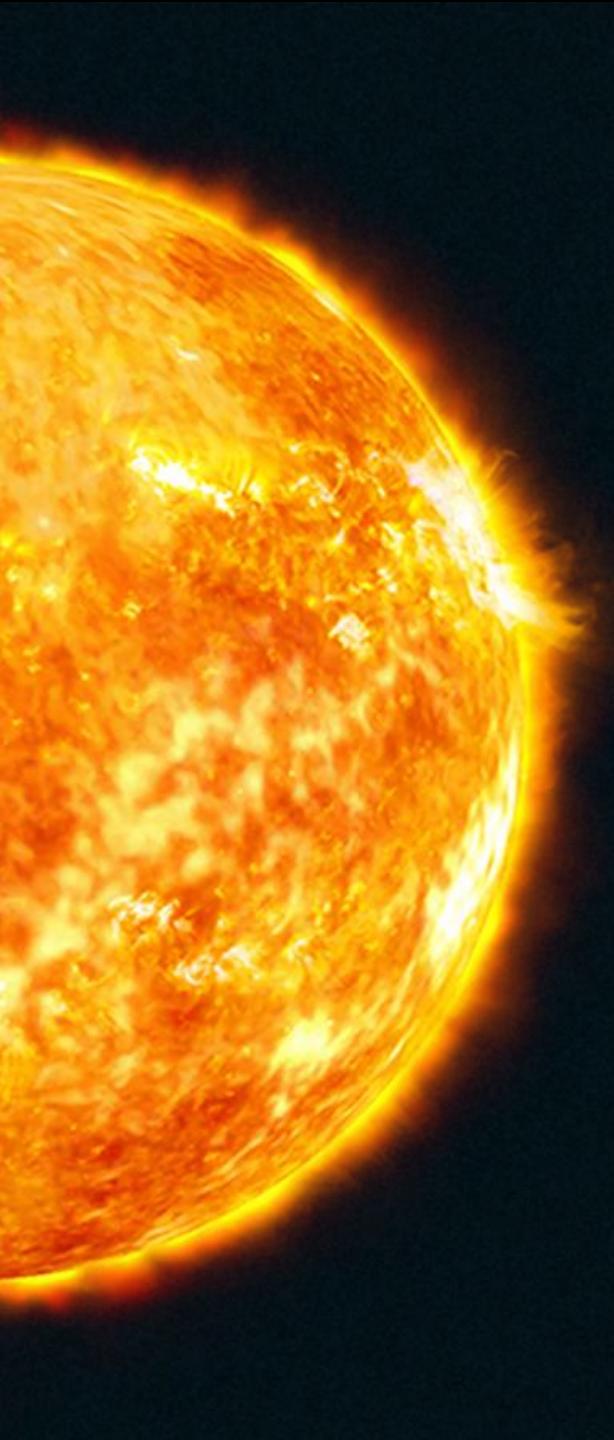
—D. Edmond Hiebert, *The Epistles of John*, 156

WHAT IS THIS LOVE?
MATTHEW 12: 31; JOHN 3: 19-21

“Selfishness seeks its own private happiness at the expense of others. Love seeks its happiness in the happiness of the beloved. It will even suffer and die for the beloved in order that its joy might be full in the life and purity of the beloved.”

—John Piper, *Desiring God*, 176

WHAT IS THIS LOVE?
MATTHEW 12: 31-32, 40-42



“Love is the queen of the graces;
it outshines all the others, as the
sun the lesser planets.”

—Thomas Watson



II. The Absence of Love Denounced

1 John 3:12, 13, 14b–15, 17

“Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer; and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him.”

A. The Quintessential Offender (v. 12)

“not as Cain, who was of the evil one and slew his brother. And for what reason did he slay him? Because his deeds were evil, and his brother’s were righteous.”

- “Not as Cain” – a surprising insertion; the only direct reference to the OT in the letter; the most infamous example of the absence of brotherly love in human history (see Genesis 4:5–10).
- “Of the evil one” – his source; he was Adam’s son but belonged to the devil (see 1 John 3:10; John 8:44).
- “For what reason?” – a question about *motive*.
- “Because his deeds were evil” – roots → fruits; nature → behavior.

B. The Universal Reality (v. 13)

“Do not be surprised, brethren, if the world hates you.”

- John contends that there are only two categories of mankind: (1) those born of God who love, and (2) those of the devil who hate.
- **“Do not be surprised”** – Cain’s hatred of Abel should not shock us, and neither should the world’s hatred for us.
- If we are shocked that the world would hate us, it is because we think far too highly of the word and live far too poorly as Christians.
- **Matthew 5:11–12; John 15:18–25**



“The serpentine nature still continues in the world. The great serpent himself reigns as the god of this world. Wonder not then that the serpentine world hates and hisses at you who belong to that seed of the woman that is to bruise the serpent’s head.”

—Matthew Henry

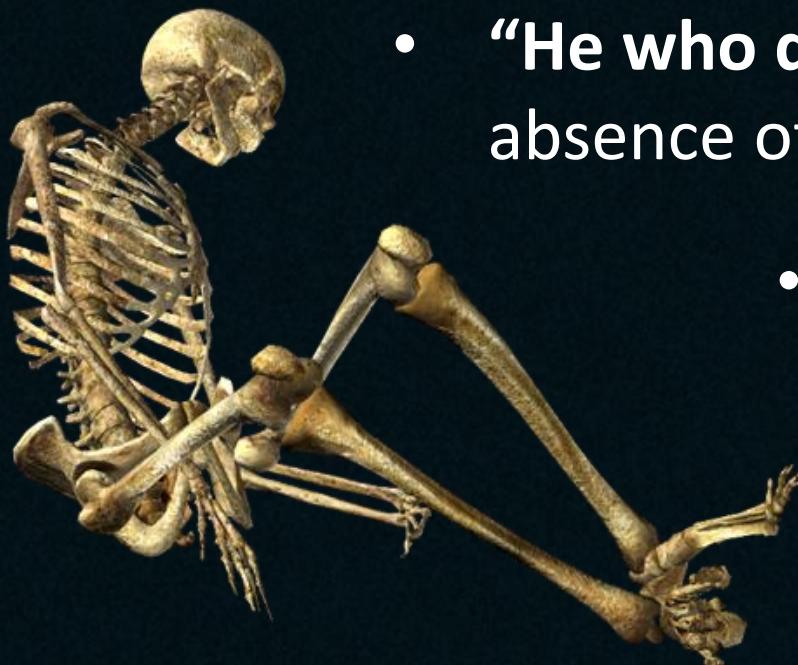
Men of the Word

C. The Unmistakable Conclusion (vv. 14b–15)

“He who 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.”**

- John first describes a crime of omission—the failure to love.
 - “**He who does not love**” – a universal rule; describes a habitual absence of love.
 - “**Abides in death**” – “remains” in the state of spiritual deadness (Eph 2:1), mastered by sin, a slave to the evil one, having no knowledge of God (John 17:3).



“It charges as a crime the want of a grace and not merely the perpetration of evil. It is not the wrong that has been done, but that a good has not been rendered. It is sin under the form of a want of conformity to the law, not a transgression of it.”

—James Morgan, *The Epistles of John*, 244



“He who 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.”

- John then describes a crime of commission—the exercise of hatred.
- “**Everyone who hates**” – a universal rule; describes anyone who engages in hatred as a practice; the absence of love = active hatred; there is no middle category.
- “**Is a murderer**” – the most heinous crime; echoes the act of Cain (v. 11).
- “Murder is in the heart before it is in the hand” (Herschel Hobbs).
- “**You know that . . .**” – the conclusion is unmistakable and self-evident.

“You have heard that the ancients were told, ‘You SHALL NOT COMMIT MURDER’ and ‘Whoever commits murder shall be liable to the court.’ But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother shall be guilty before the court; and whoever says to his brother, ‘You good-for-nothing,’ shall be guilty before the supreme court; and whoever says, ‘You fool,’ shall be guilty *enough to go* into the fiery hell.”

—**Matthew 5:21–22**

“The guilt of the sin lies in the inner motive, not merely the outward act.”

—Hiebert, *The Epistles of John*, 158

D. The Practical Test (v. 17)

“But **whoever** has the world’s goods, and sees his brother in need and **closes his heart against him**, **how does the love of God abide in him?**”

- John takes the discussion out of the realm of the abstract and extreme (as seen in v. 16) with a practical illustration.
- “**Whoever**” – John again states his teaching in terms of a universal rule.
- “**Closes his heart against him**” – *literally*, “closes his bowels”; the inner organs were considered the source of *compassion*.
- “**How does the love of God abide in him?**” – a rhetorical question which assumes a negative answer: “It does not!”



III. The Practice of Love Extolled

1 John 3:14a, 16, 18,
19–22

*“We know that we have passed out of death into life,
because we love the brethren.”*

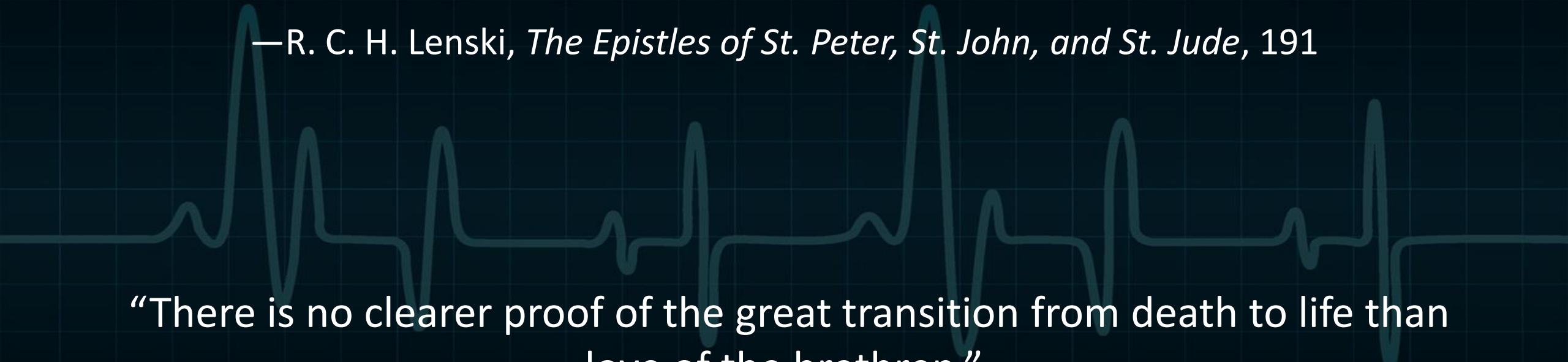
A. The Reassuring Witness (v. 14a)

“We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brethren.”

- **“We know”** – emphatic: “we ourselves know”; expresses a confident state of knowing that is justified.
- **“That we have passed out of death into life”** – the content of this knowledge; describes *regeneration* (John 3:5–8), the *once-for-all* transfer from the realm of spiritual death into eternal life (Eph 2:1–5; John 17:3).
- **“Because we love”** – describes an on-going practice of love.
- **“The brethren”** – other believers.

“Both the physical life and the spiritual life are not seen directly but are apparent only from their evidence, their activity.”

—R. C. H. Lenski, *The Epistles of St. Peter, St. John, and St. Jude*, 191



“There is no clearer proof of the great transition from death to life than love of the brethren.”

—Robert Law, *Tests of Life*

B. The Supreme Example (v. 16)

“We know love by this, that He laid down His life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren.”

- **“We know love by this”** – the nature of “love” is not mysterious, enigmatic, or ethereal; it has been definitively revealed.
- **“He laid down His life for us”** – the definite revelation is found in the substitutionary atonement/propitiation of Jesus Christ.
- **1 John 1:7; 2:2**
- **John 10:11, 14–15, 17–18; 15:12–14**

“Here Is Love” (*Hymns of Grace*, #185)

[1] Here is love, vast as the ocean,
Lovingkindness as the flood,
When the Prince of Life, our Ransom,
Shed for us His precious blood.
Who His love will not remember?
Who can cease to sing His praise?
He can never be forgotten
Throughout heav’n’s eternal days.

[2] On the mount of crucifixion
Fountains opened deep and wide;
Through the floodgates of God’s mercy
Flowed a vast and gracious tide.
Grace and love, like mighty rivers,
Poured incessant from above,
Heav’n’s peace and perfect justice
Kissed a guilty world in love.

“We know love by this, that He laid down His life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren.”

- **“We ought to lay down our lives . . .”** – the definitive revelation of love (Christ’s propitiation for *our* sins) naturally compels us to mimic His example.
- Our imitation is not for the purpose of atonement, but for the goal of benefiting others even at great personal expense.
- Matthew Henry: “Here is the condescension, the miracle, the mystery of divine love, that God would redeem the church with his own blood! Surely we should love those whom God hath loved, and so loved; and we shall certainly do so if we have any love for God.”

“‘Self-preservation’ is the first law of physical life;
but ‘self-sacrifice’ is the first law of spiritual life.”

—Warren Wiersbe, *Be Real*, 127

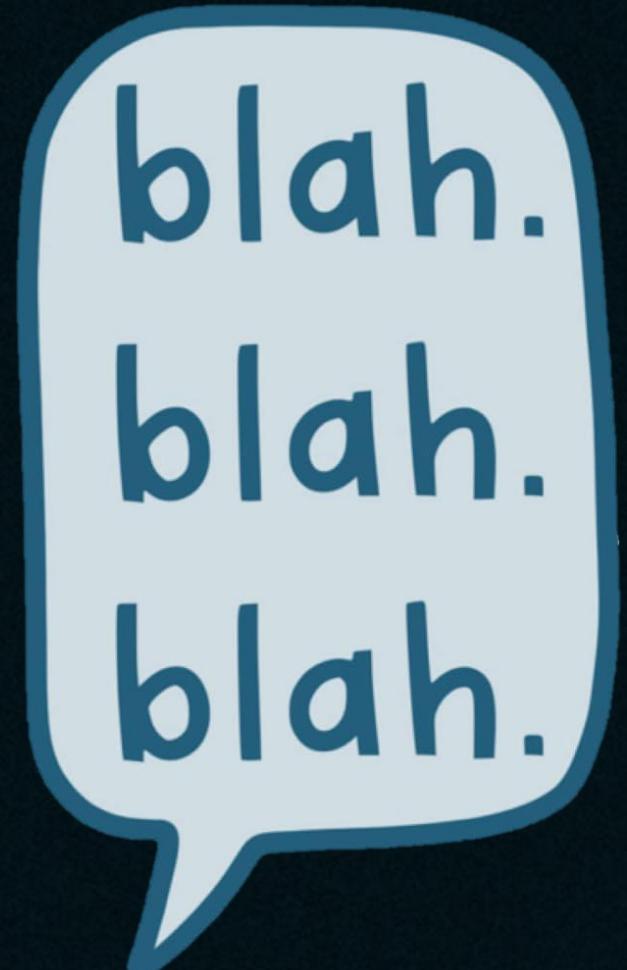
C. The Necessary Qualification (v. 18)

“Little children, let us not love with word or with tongue, but in deed and truth.”

- **“Little children”** – John again addresses his audience with words of affirmation and care; he is confident they are in the family of faith.
- **“With word or with tongue”** – mere confessions (remember 1:6, 8, 10); talk is cheap, love cannot be a matter of mere lip-service.
- **“But in deed and truth”** – real love is expressed truly in action.
- **“Too easily, in dreaming of unrequired heroisms, one misses the humble sacrifices of ease and luxury, of self-will and social pride, awaiting him in the daily occurrences of life”** (Findlay, *Fellowship in Life Eternal*, 281).

“We must above all beware of crediting to ourselves as love what is but the mouthing of well-sounding phrases, the play of imagination upon lofty ideals, or the thrill of merely emotional sympathies. We are apt to regard our appreciation of those ideals and our susceptibility to those emotions as entitling us to a high place in the moral scale—to feel as if we had paid every debt to love when we have praised its beauty, felt its charm, and experienced its sentiment.”

—Robert Law, *Tests of Life*



Men of the Word

D. The Beneficial Effects (vv. 19–22)

“We will know by this that we are of the truth, and will assure our heart before Him in whatever our heart condemns us; for God is greater than our heart and knows all things. 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 the things that are pleasing in His sight.”

- On the one hand, it appears as though the apostle John digresses in vv. 19–22 to talk about matters of the conscience and of prayer.
- But a careful study of the language of these verses indicates that they continue John’s instruction about love—specifically, by identifying several of love’s *benefits*.

“We will know **by this** that we are of the truth, and **will assure our heart before Him** in whatever our heart condemns us; for God is greater than our heart and knows all things” (3:19–20).

- “**By this**” – points back to the end of v. 18, to loving “in deed and truth.”
- “**That we are of the truth**” – our practical, sincere expressions of love for each other (v. 18b) are to give us confidence that we are “of the truth” and not like Cain—“of the evil one” (v. 12).
- “**Will assure our heart**” – the start of a new sentence; John acknowledges that believers struggle with “self-condemnation,” but they cannot look to their own heart as last word in the matter; God is the authority for determining assurance, and unlike our hearts, He knows our true condition perfectly.

“Whatever the cause for our own heart’s thus passing judgment upon us, the believer can take the matter before God for His judgment Our conscience, troubled by the matter that it knows against us, can before God be quieted on the basis of the tests John here indicates.”

—Hiebert, *The Epistles of John*, 167

“First, there is the objective test of moral behavior—whether our love expresses itself in action. Second, there is the faith that God alone is the arbiter in this matter.”

—J. L. Houlden, *Johannine Epistles*, 101

Although the omniscience of God is a terror for false professors, it is a reassuring comfort to genuine believers. God sees beyond our external inconsistencies and mixed signals and knows our heart.

“He said to him the third time, ‘Simon, son of John, do you love Me?’ Peter was grieved because He said to him the third time, ‘Do you love Me?’ And he said to Him, ‘Lord, You know all things; You know that I love You.’”

—John 21:17

Men of the Word

“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 the things that are pleasing in His sight” (3:21–22).

- **“Beloved”** – John again addresses his audience with a confidence-inspiring term.
- **“If our heart does not condemn us”** – John returns to the standard of loving “in deed and truth” he established in v. 18b; as we gain assurance from fulfilling this standard, we gain an additional advantage.
- **“Confidence before God”** – emphatic in the original language: “then confidence we have to God”; the term “confidence” refers to a state of boldness, especially in speaking before someone of high rank; *prayer*.

“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 the things that are pleasing in His sight” (3:21–22).

- **“Whatever we ask we receive”** – John is not advocating a “name it and claim it” approach to prayer, but rather stating a simple reality. Whereas God does not listen to those who are of the evil one, He listens to those who are His own.
- The assurance nurtured by truly loving one’s brother leads to a whole new approach to prayer; prayer is effective and rewarding, not futile.
- John will provide greater detail on this topic in 1 John 5:14–15.



IV. The Necessity of Love Reasserted

1 John 3:23–24

“This is His commandment, that we believe in the name of His Son Jesus Christ, and love one another.”

“This is His commandment, that we believe in the name of His Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, just as He commanded us. The one who keeps His commandments abides in Him, and He in him. We know by this that He abides in us, by the Spirit whom He has given us” (3:23–24).

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A STUDY OF FIRST JOHN