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Sermon Brief
Text: 1 John 3:11-24
Title: Living in Confidence
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Seeking to faith-
fully proclaim
the whole coun-
cil of God in
scripture!



INTRODUCTION

Life throws many challenges against us. Often these difficulties produce doubt and uncertainty. “You can’t do this!” “You’re not smart enough to do that!” On and on go these challenges with the impact of causing us to fail and even to become scared to try to do something. Doubt and uncertainty are cripples to life and the enjoyment of living.

Toward the end of the first Christian century the apostle John was serving the Lord in the region of the ancient city of Ephesus. Christianity had been in existence now for several decades and was making substantial progress in winning people to faith in Christ. But also starting to take place was the emerging of alternative forms of Christian faith. False teachers were not satisfied with the message of the Gospel as presented by the apostles under Jesus’ command to disciple all nations.¹ Growing anti-Jewish attitudes among Gentile Christians sparked movements to turn to their own cultural background as a foundational structure for understanding Christianity. Adoption of the latest fad in philosophical thinking, reaching back to alternative religious traditions out of their pagan past -- these and more motives led to a wide array of versions of Christianity that stood in direct contradiction to the apostolic Gospel. The impact on the fledgling Christian movement was devastating. Churches were divided and bitter animosity within the various house-church groups in many of the cities exploded.

Ephesus was one of those volatile locations ripe for heretical teachers and teachings. The Christian mission had begun there in the early 50s during the second missionary journey of the apostle Paul. On the third missionary trip, the apostle had spent over two years in Ephesus seeking to strengthen and stabilize the Christian community. Then in the early to mid 60s, shortly before the martyrdom of Paul in the mid 60s, Timothy had been dispatched to Ephesus to try to help stabilize the Christian community in Ephesus and the surrounding region. Paul wrote two letters to him -- I and II Timothy -- giving him encouragement and advice on how to help the churches. Already by this point, heresy and false teaching was rampant in the Christian community there. Now in the late 80s and 90s of the first century the apostle John settled in Ephesus and spent his final years ministering to the Christians in and around Ephesus.

In 1 John 3:11-24, he wrote words of encouragement and direction for these believers in order to persuade them to abandon their inclinations toward these false teachings. Hear his words:

11 For this is the message you have heard from the beginning, that we should love one another. 12 We must not be like Cain who was from the evil one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his own deeds were evil and his brother’s righteous. 13 Do not be astonished, brothers and sisters, that the world hates you. 14 We know that we have passed from death to life because we love one another. Whoever does not love abides in death. 15 All who hate a brother or sister are murderers, and you know that murderers do not have eternal life abiding in them. 16 We know love by this, that he laid down his life for us — and we ought to lay down our lives for one another. 17 How does God’s love abide in anyone who has the world’s goods and sees a brother or sister in need and yet refuses help? 18 Little children, let us love, not in word or speech, but in truth and action.

19 And by this we will know that we are from the truth and will reassure our hearts before him 20 whenever our hearts condemn us; for God is greater than our hearts, and he knows everything. 21 Beloved, if our hearts do not condemn us, we have boldness before God; 22 and we receive from him whatever we ask, because we obey his commandments and do what pleases him. 23 And this is his commandment, that we should believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ and love one another, just as he has commanded us. 24 All who obey his commandments abide in him, and he abides in them. And by this we know that he abides in us, by the Spirit that he has given us.²

¹Cf. Matthew 28:16-20.

²GNT: 3:11 “Ὅτι αὕτη ἐστὶν ἡ ἀγγελία ἣν ἠκούσατε ἀπ’ ἀρχῆς, ἵνα ἀγαπῶμεν ἀλλήλους, 3:12 οὐ καθὼς Κάιν ἐκ τοῦ πονηροῦ ἦν καὶ ἐσφαξεν τὸν ἀδελφὸν αὐτοῦ· καὶ χάριν τίνος ἔσφαξεν αὐτόν· ὅτι τὰ ἔργα αὐτοῦ πονηρὰ ἦν τὰ δὲ τοῦ ἀδελφοῦ αὐτοῦ δίκαια. 3:13 καὶ μὴ θαυμάζετε, ἀδελφοί, εἰ μισεῖ ὑμᾶς ὁ κόσμος. 3:14 ἡμεῖς οἶδαμεν ὅτι μεταβηθήκαμεν ἐκ τοῦ θανάτου εἰς τὴν ζωὴν, ὅτι ἀγαπῶμεν τοὺς ἀδελφούς· ὁ μὴ ἀγαπῶν μένει ἐν τῷ θανάτῳ. 3:15 πᾶς ὁ μισῶν τὸν ἀδελφὸν αὐτοῦ ἀνθρωποκτόνος ἐστίν, καὶ οἴδατε ὅτι πᾶς ἀνθρωποκτόνος οὐκ ἔχει ζωὴν αἰώνιον ἐν αὐτῷ μένουσαν. 3:16 ἐν τούτῳ ἐγνώκαμεν τὴν

Our strong temptation when doubt arises is to grab hold of anything that comes along promising certainty and confidence. This is what the believers at Ephesus had done. They had latched on to the philosophical underpinnings of Platonic Greek thinking being advocated by the so-called Gnostic teachers in the Christian community. This more familiar way of thinking consistent with their cultural heritage had great appeal. But at its heart were fundamental contradictions to the apostolic gospel message. The impact of this teaching was disastrous on the Christian community. Bitterness and discord erupted in the community. Spiritual elitism took center stage because of the claim to having been enlightened by a secret divine knowledge that enabled them to speak in tongues and 'rise above' material concerns. Moral laxity became dominant, since in paganism morality and religion had no connection to one another. And the teaching of the heretics was based on their pagan backgrounds more than on the gospel message of Christ.

One major by-product of all this was the injection of doubt and uncertainty in the thinking of Christians in Ephesus. How do we know the Truth of God? Where do we find certainty in life? Can we be sure of our salvation before God? These kinds of questions were prevalent there. John's words in our text were intended to give a correction to this false thinking, and to provide a solid foundation of confidence and hope to the believers in Ephesus.

Out of this comes some timeless truths vitally relevant to us as believers in the modern world. I want to stress but two of these today from the text around the theme of building confidence. Two keys commitments are essential confidence builders here: love and obedience.

BODY

I. Love builds confidence, vv. 11-18

11 For this is the message you have heard from the beginning, **that we should love one another.** 12 We must not be like Cain who was from the evil one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his own deeds were evil and his brother's righteous. 13 Do not be astonished, brothers and sisters, that the world hates you. 14 We know that we have passed from death to life because **we love one another.** Whoever does not love abides in death. 15 All who hate a brother or sister are murderers, and you know that murderers do not have eternal life abiding in them. 16 **We know love** by this, that he laid down his life for us — and we ought to lay down our lives for one another. 17 How does God's love abide in anyone who has the world's goods and sees a brother or sister in need and yet refuses help? 18 Little children, let us love, not in word or speech, but in truth and action.

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In verses 11-18, the aged apostle reminds the Ephesian Christians of the central role of Christian love. "We should love one another," is his central message. This, he declares, is not some newly thought up idea. To the contrary, it is a message that goes all the way back to Jesus himself in the beginning of the Christian movement. This theme had legitimate roots, unlike the false teaching from the gnostic teachers

ἀγάπην, ὅτι ἐκεῖνος ὑπὲρ ἡμῶν τὴν ψυχὴν αὐτοῦ ἔθηκεν· καὶ ἡμεῖς ὀφείλομεν ὑπὲρ τῶν ἀδελφῶν τὰς ψυχὰς θείναι. 3·17 ὅς δ' ἂν ἔχη τὸν βίον τοῦ κόσμου καὶ θεωρῇ τὸν ἀδελφὸν αὐτοῦ χρεῖαν ἔχοντα καὶ κλείσῃ τὰ σπλάγχνα αὐτοῦ ἀπ' αὐτοῦ, πῶς ἡ ἀγάπη τοῦ θεοῦ μένει ἐν αὐτῷ· 3·18 Τεκνία, μὴ ἀγαπῶμεν λόγῳ μηδὲ τῇ γλώσσῃ ἀλλὰ ἐν ἔργῳ καὶ ἀληθείᾳ.

3·19 Καὶ ἐν τούτῳ γνωσόμεθα ὅτι ἐκ τῆς ἀληθείας ἐσμέν, καὶ ἔμπροσθεν αὐτοῦ πείσομεν τὴν καρδίαν ἡμῶν, 3·20 ὅτι ἐὰν καταγινώσκη ἡμῶν ἡ καρδία, ὅτι μείζων ἐστὶν ὁ θεὸς τῆς καρδίας ἡμῶν καὶ γινώσκει πάντα. 3·21 Ἀγαπητοί, ἐὰν ἡ καρδία ἡμῶν μὴ καταγινώσκη, παρρησίαν ἔχομεν πρὸς τὸν θεόν 3·22 καὶ ὁ ἐὰν αἰτῶμεν λαμβάνομεν ἀπ' αὐτοῦ, ὅτι τὰς ἐντολὰς αὐτοῦ τηροῦμεν καὶ τὰ ἀρεστὰ ἐνώπιον αὐτοῦ ποιοῦμεν. 3·23 καὶ αὕτη ἐστὶν ἡ ἐντολὴ αὐτοῦ, ἵνα πιστεύσωμεν τῷ ὀνόματι τοῦ υἱοῦ αὐτοῦ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ καὶ ἀγαπῶμεν ἀλλήλους, καθὼς ἔδωκεν ἐντολὴν ἡμῖν. 3·24 καὶ ὁ τηρῶν τὰς ἐντολὰς αὐτοῦ ἐν αὐτῷ μένει καὶ αὐτὸς ἐν αὐτῷ· καὶ ἐν τούτῳ γινώσκομεν ὅτι μένει ἐν ἡμῖν, ἐκ τοῦ πνεύματος οὗ ἡμῖν ἔδωκεν.

were dreaming up new ideas about Christianity. And this command to love was the 'agape' love, which meant self-sacrifice and intentional commitment to others. It was not some warm, fuzzy feeling toward other people. Rather genuine love deliberately chose to look beyond self and focus on the needs of others.

In verse 12, John contrasts this love with the ancient story of Cain and Able in Genesis four. Cain murdered his brother out of jealousy because God favored the sacrifices given by Able over those of Cain. John understood the root of this first human murder recorded in the Bible as coming out of an evil heart of Cain that led to evil actions.

This example, John contends, serves to remind us about the dangers of failing to love one another in the Christian community. When we become victims of hatred, we understand the evil nature of the people hating us. "Don't be astonished," John declares, "if the world hates you." It is evil and evil leads to hatred, not to authentic love.

This shouldn't be surprising to us today. God's people have seldom ever been popular in the eyes of the world. All of us have experienced various forms of this opposition from the world around us. We believing Christians live in a society that looks upon us as some kind of strange religious sect, that is not legitimate. And we are discriminated against in many different ways because of this. Ridicule, rejection, and even more will come against us. The temptation is to want to strike back in retaliation. But as we have been studying in the series on the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus absolutely forbids us to do so.

But John has something else in mind here as well. Within the Christian community at Ephesus lots of anger and little brotherly love were present. Based on the example of Cain, John contends that brotherly love is a confidence builder of having passed from spiritual death to spiritual life (cf. v. 14). Note his declaration: "We know that we have passed from death to life because we love one another. Whoever does not love abides in death." We know our spiritual status before God. How? Because we are loving one another. When a believer reaches out to fellow believers in genuine love, this is a clear signal that his / her life has moved out of spiritual death and into new life in Christ. John makes his point even more blunt: "Whoever does not love abides in death." The false teachers' promotion of their 'superior' version of Christianity paid no attention to the demands of Jesus to love one another. Everything was focused on the highly emotion experience of the individual and his encounter with God supposedly. Through their system of super-charged emotional worship they 'experienced God' in superior ways that made them better Christians than anyone else in the church. This produced elitism that fostered bitterness and animosity among the community. John saw in this a clear indication that these people in reality had absolutely no knowledge of God at all. They were still living in spiritual death, even though they claimed to be super-Christians. What a self-deception!

Folks, no matter how pious we think we are, if we aren't loving one another we are fooling ourselves about our spiritual status before God. Simple spiritual reality is that brotherly love is a clear indication of proper relationship to God. And the absence of it clearly signals the presence of spiritual death, rather than spiritual life. Bitter dislike of other believers is an unmistakable sign of spiritual death in the individual.

Now what does it mean to love one another? Verses 16-18 spell out the implications of true brotherly love: "16 We know love by this, that he laid down his life for us — and we ought to lay down our lives for one another. 17 How does God's love abide in anyone who has the world's goods and sees a brother or sister in need and yet refuses help? 18 Little children, let us love, not in word or speech, but in truth and action." Three essential points are made by John here.

First, the standard of love is the sacrificial death of Jesus on the cross (v. 16). He laid down his life for us. That means, we must be willing to do the same for other believers. Now that's a very high standard! But, none the less, it's one that we must be committed to.

Second, brotherly love reaches out to meet physical needs present in fellow believers (v. 17). When we are able to help people with their physical needs, we are under divine mandate to do so. Christianity must never ever be twisted into something that is so 'spiritual' that it ignores the physical needs to people, and in particular those of fellow believers. Such Christianity is utterly false and void of the love of God.

Third, brotherly love is not talk. Instead, it is concrete action based on divine truth. We can talk about loving one another, but such doesn't happen until we 'put feet to our words.' We must take specific actions to help those in need.

Wow! John sets forth some challenging demands here. But they are vitally important to authentic Christianity. And to our developing confidence about life and about our relationship with God. We must become 'beyond the nose looking people.' By that I mean, true Christianity will see beyond itself and focus attention on others rather than on self.

Folks, this applies not just to us as individual believers. There is a collection application here as well. If a church focuses only on itself, it loses sight of something vitally important. We are not in the empire building business. Many of these so-called non-denominational churches are not churches at all. Instead, they are the personal empire of some preacher with a hugely self-centered focus. God didn't call His church to be

anything like this. The church must find ways to reach out in love beyond its borders. Today is IBC Day all across our denomination. And this is a good occasion to remind ourselves that we are a part of a network of other Baptist congregations in some 27 different countries. And through our contributions to the IBC Cooperative Program we are reaching out to help other congregations in times of struggle and hardship. And we have been on the receiving end of this very same kind of help from our sister IBC churches. The truth of the matter is simple. Had it not been for this help repeatedly over the past few years, the IBC Cologne would not exist today. I deep passion for us as a church is that we will seek more ways to reaching beyond our church to help fellow believers through the IBC in other places. Brotherly love is vitally important for us as a church.

II. Obedience builds confidence, vv. 19-24

19 And by this we will know that we are from the truth and will reassure our hearts before him 20 whenever our hearts condemn us; for God is greater than our hearts, and he knows everything. 21 Beloved, if our hearts do not condemn us, we have boldness before God; 22 and we receive from him whatever we ask, because we obey his commandments and do what pleases him. 23 And this is his commandment, that we should believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ and love one another, just as he has commanded us. 24 All who obey his commandments abide in him, and he abides in them. And by this we know that he abides in us, by the Spirit that he has given us

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The second confidence builder that John speaks of in our passage comes in vv. 19-24. The heart of its is simply obedience. Verse 24 brings this clearly to the surface as the climax to John’s discussion in these verses. Obedience to God and the presence of the Holy Spirit are vitally linked. Knowing that we have the Spirit of God is not linked to emotional feeling. We don’t feel the presence of the Spirit. We know the Spirit is present because we are walking in faithful obedience to the teaching of the gospel. Eventually I’m going to preach a sermon on the relation of the Holy Spirit and feeling. But the simple truth of scripture is that the presence of the Holy Spirit is seldom if ever connected to feeling. The presence of the Spirit is linked to knowledge of God and to obeying God day by day. It is an awareness of God’s presence through His Spirit in our lives that comes through our faith commitment to surrender our lives to Him in a daily walk of obedience.

Obedience is the key to having confidence before God. For John this was crucial to a number of blessings in the Christian life. To the Christians in Ephesus that John was writing to he declared that they could know their status before God even when their ‘hearts’ were not certain. In the brotherly love commitment in the previous verses God then affirms that we can know that we belong to God. The Gnostic teachers were claiming superior knowledge of God through their esoteric religious experiences. John response was that this is delusion. These people were living in darkness, not in the light of God’s truth. To those believers committed to following the apostolic gospel John asserts that they know without question that they belong to God. And God will work down inside them to confirm this.

Remember the meaning of ‘heart’ in the ancient world. As a word picture it referred not to the feeling side of the person, but to the will, the choosing, intentional part of the individual. Thus the choosing side, the ‘heart,’ could play tricks on us. Did I really choose Christ? Am I really committed to Christ? I don’t know whether I genuinely decided to follow Jesus. All these ideas floating around are sources of doubt and thus of spiritual defeat.

But John’s counter response is that you can’t trust your heart. You have to rise above it in the confidence building that faith commitment brings. Knowing that you are walking in obedience to the Truth of the Gospel is all you need: “**And this is his commandment, that we should believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ and love one another, just as he has commanded us.**”

The blessings? First, John speaks of boldness before God: παρρησίαν ἔχομεν πρὸς τὸν θεόν. The Greek word relates primarily to confidence in coming before God with our prayer requests etc. Our obeying faith enables us to come before the throne of the Ruler of this universe with confidence that we are qualified to stand before such an awesome God. We can approach God, not because we are worthy or because of any accomplishment on our part. He has allowed us entrance into His presence through Christ having come into our life. And thus it is solely through our faith commitment to Jesus as the Son of God that we have this

privilege. Our faith commitment lived out in brotherly love then bolsters our confidence to come to the mighty God and to develop a close friendship with Him.

Second, he speaks of answered prayer: “we receive from him whatever we ask, because we obey his commandments and do what pleases him.” Be careful not to twist the statement of scripture here. Answered prayer grows out of consistent obedience to God. These two realities are inseparably linked. Unanswered prayer is not because of lack of faith. Just believe harder and you will get what you want. This false teaching is rampant in many circles of Christianity. A thousand times no to such thinking we must declare. This turns answered prayer into superstition and makes of it a rabbit’s foot, a lucky charm. Spiritual reality demands that our prayer requests grow out of obeying God, which imposes boundaries and limits on our requests. Our request must be consistent with the obedience God requires of us. We must pray always ‘according to God’s will’ and not according to our own desires. Jesus laid down the foundational principle in the Garden of Gethsemana: “not my will be done, but yours.”

With this kind of praying God can and will answer prayer. And do so in ways we could never have imagined. Those of us who have been in this church for a period of time can bear eloquent witness to this as we’ve seen God working in this congregation to accomplish things we never imagined possible.

CONCLUSION

Confidence. Living in confidence. This is important to an abundant Christian life. And from God’s Word here we realize that brotherly love and obedience to God in genuine faith are two major confidence builders.

How’s your confidence level today?