



Sunday School Lesson
1 John 3:11-25
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Love and Confidence



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With this fourth lesson in the “Encountering God” theme in the Smyth-Helwys Formations Sunday School lesson series, we turn to the first letter of John. This document is one of five in the so-called Johannine corpus of the New Testament. There are the gospel, three letters and the book of Revelation. The name is derived from the early church tradition that assigned authorship of these five documents to the apostle John. But in reality, only Revelation comes close to identifying itself as having come from the apostle. With the gospel and the three letters no mention is made anywhere internally about who was responsible for their composition. Thus the Church Fathers from the second Christian century to the middle ages become the primary external sources for attempting an identification. Interestingly, one doesn't find a unified voice here until very, very late in the ancient period leading up to the middle ages. So we will have to look carefully at the external history (below) in examining that issue in detail.

I Context

As we repeat almost in almost every study, the contextual setting both historically and literarily serve critical roles in accurate understanding of the scripture texts. That is not different here. Once again we will draw upon a previous study in 1 John ([4:7-21](#)) for the relevant background information

a. Historical

Who was responsible for the composition of this document?

1 John is one of three letters in the General (Catholic) Letter section of our New Testament with the name of ‘John’ attached to them. Careful reading of the texts of these letters will leave the reader searching in vain for any direct mentioning of John as the writer of any of these letters. The only person’s name mentioned in 1 John is Jesus Christ. In 2 and 3 John the sender of these letters is identified only as “the elder.”

Where then does the idea that a John wrote these letters originate, since it cannot be based directly on references to the writer inside these documents? The answer comes from early Christian tradition in

the second through eighth centuries. Yet, careful examination of this body of early Christian literature indicates difference of opinion over the author of this letter. The term ‘The Elder’ in 2 and 3 John was gradually identified with the apostle John, the son of Zebedee, in the gospels in many early Christian circles, but not in all. Papias of Hierapolis in 130 AD challenged this view, as did Dionsyus of Alexandria in 262 AD. Eventually, however, the linking of the three letters, along with the fourth gospel and the book of Revelation, with the apostle John prevailed and become the



basis for the headings of these three letters containing the name 'John.' Current biblical scholarship reflects divided opinion on how reliable this early church tradition is. Serious arguments, both pro and con, can be marshaled in support of either side of the issue.

My personal *inclination* is to link the three letters together (at minimum, only 1 John) with the fourth gospel in a common authorship, although readily acknowledging the difficulties of such. At best, tentative conclusions must be drawn, rather than hard-and-fast judgments. The contents of the three documents provide some helpful insight into the historical situation surrounding their composition toward the close of the first Christian century.

Where was this document written?

Most scholars, although skeptical of early church tradition about John the apostle as author, will nevertheless accept the early church idea that associates the writing of 1 John in and around the ancient city of [Ephesus](#) toward the end of the first Christian century. Within the traditional view of authorship, the understanding is that the apostle John spent the last several decades of his earthly life in ministry to Christians in Ephesus.

If correct, then this letter emerges after the initial preaching of the gospel in the city by Paul in the middle 50s. Another apostle has become a revered leader of the Christian movement there. This letter is then addressed to the believing community at Ephesus, in a manner similar to Paul's Letter to the Ephesians, although we can determine far less of the specific circumstances surrounding the Ephesian community of faith at this point in time.

To whom what this document written initially, and why?

The above exploration probed the historical identification of the recipients of the letter from early church tradition. From the contents of 1 John some insight can be gleaned about the first readers of this letter. Through a careful reading of the document, one can see that the teaching authority of the writer had been challenged and thus the letter was responding to that challenge. An alternative understanding of



Christianity was being set forth in the Christian community(s) of Asia, and this new view of the gospel led to behavioral patterns that were different from those set forth in the apostolic gospel message as G. B. Caird ("Johannine Letters," *New Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, iPerach) describes:

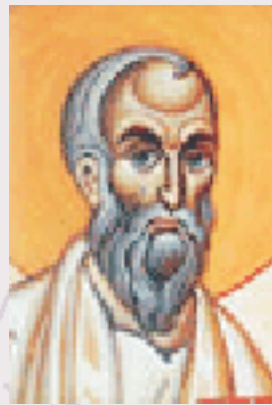
"Throughout the first letter we find a series of warnings against those who make claims which are not justified by the facts: 'if we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness' (1:6); 'if we say we have no sin' (1:8); 'he who says 'I know him' but disobeys his commandments' (2:4); 'he who says he abides in him' (2:6); 'if any one says, 'I love God,' and hates his brother' (4:20). It is obvious that these denunciations are not made without good reason and that someone has actually been making such professions. The opposition has been laying claim to a special knowledge and love of God and to a peculiarly intimate relationship with him which has set them above the common distinctions between good and evil and therefore above the demands of Christian ethics. It is probable, too, that the initial message of the letter: 'God is light and in him is no darkness at all,' is directed against a theology which held that God comprehended in himself both light and darkness."

This opposition movement had questioned the incarnation of Christ (2:20; 4:2). Although previously participating in the apostolic believing community, they had abandoned it (2:19) in order to begin their own version of Christianity, and it had been met with pagan acceptance (4:5). G.B. Caird sums up the identity of this group with this statement:

"An aberrant Christianity, which teaches salvation by esoteric knowledge, excites an enthusiasm devoid of moral concern, and nourishes a spirituality contemptuous of all things material, can be identified unmistakably as an early form of the movement which came to be known as Gnosis or GNOSTICISM. At this stage, however, there is no sign of the gross sensuality which was countenanced by some of the later developments of the Gnostic heresy; the moral laxity here stigmatized consists solely in an indifference to the practical demands of the law of love."

Therefore, the main thrust of 1 John was to assure the members of the apostolic community of the essence of authentic Christianity, both in its belief and in its ethics, as a corrective to the false teaching being spread by the opposition. What we see in

1 John is a Christian leader appealing to believers to base their religious experience on a firm foundation, rather than the foundation of falsehood and error.



b. Literary

In order to make sense of our passage, some exploration of the literary aspects needs to take place, along side the historical exploration just attempted. This focuses on the way the contents of the document was written (genre), how our passage contributes to the message of the entire document (context), and how the ideas are organized inside the passage itself (rhetorical structure).

What is the literary style of this passage?

Although labeled an ancient letter, this document bears few of the marks that are found in ancient letters. See my discussion on this at Cranfordville.com under <http://cranfordville.com/NT-genre.htm#Epistle>.

In contrast, [2 John](#) and [3 John](#) follow ancient letter patterns very closely. The prologue of [1 John 1:1-4](#) somewhat sets the foundation for the remainder of the document (NRSV):

“1 We declare to you what was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands, concerning the word of life— 2 this life was revealed, and we have seen it and testify to it, and declare to you the eternal life that was with the Father and was revealed to us— 3 we declare to you what we have seen and heard so that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ. 4 We are writing these things so that

our joy may be complete.”

As to literary form, the Bible student can only conclude that 1 John is an ancient letter in a very loose definition of the term. More accurate is that the document is an ancient tractate defending a specific theological/philosophical viewpoint.

The text should be read against this backdrop.

What is the literary setting of this passage?

The development of ideas from 1:5 through 5:21 does not follow a logical progression of moving from one idea to the next one etc. The line of reasoning in 1 John has often been labeled ‘spiral’ (Caird). This means a hand full of ideas will be tossed out and will resurface periodically either individually, or in connection to others, frequently in new combinations of thoughts. The most dominant ideas relate to who God and Christ are, and to the basic principle of Christian love.

The emphasis on love has been summed up well by David Rensberger in the *Abingdon Commentary*:

The centrality of love can be seen in the things for which it is the signal and test: knowing and abiding in God (2:3-6; 3:23-24; 4:7-8, 12, 16), walking in the light (2:9-11), being God’s child (2:29; 3:10; 4:7), eternal life (3:14), confidence at the judgment (4:17-18), and our own love for God (4:20–5:1). People do not become children of God by their own good deeds; to be born of God is a gift of God’s love, which calls forth and enables Christians’ love (3:1-2; 4:9-11, 19). Yet love united to christological confession is the one unailing test of those who truly are God’s children (4:7; 5:1). Where there is no love at work, there is no Christianity. This implies that Christianity is not purely a matter of individual salvation, since love cannot be practiced by one person alone. Knowing God, loving God, being confident of eternal life—all the things that we might consider “spiritual”—are real only in concrete living in community with other human beings. “Beloved, let us love one another” (4:7).

II. Message

1 John 3:11-24 has been understood in several different structural patterns. But the one that seems to make greater sense to me is a twofold division based upon signals coming from within the text itself from a distinctive writing style found in this document. Normally when one uses the pronoun “this” (here αὕτη) it refers back to something said previously. In 1 John, however, a dominate tendency is to use the pronoun and then define what it means with something following it (both instances here an appositional ἵνα-clause is used). In both verses 11 and 23 this literary pattern shows up in almost the same structure (See [Diagram](#) and the [Semantic Diagram](#)):

“this is...”

v. 11 - the message;
v. 23- his command

“that we should...”

v. 11 - love one another;
v. 23 - believe and love one another

We will take this as the key signal for organizing our study of these verses.

a. Message, vv. 11-22

Greek NT

3·11 Ὅτι αὕτη ἐστὶν ἡ ἀγγελία ἣν ἠκούσατε ἀπ' ἀρχῆς, ἵνα ἀγαπῶμεν ἀλλήλους, 3·12 οὐ καθὼς Κάιν ἐκ τοῦ πονηροῦ ἦν καὶ ἔσφαξεν 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 μεταβεβήκαμεν 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 οἶδατε ὅτι πᾶς ἀνθρωποκτόνος οὐκ ἔχει ζωὴν αἰώνιον ἐν αὐτῷ μένουσαν. 3·16 ἐν τούτῳ ἐγνώκαμεν τὴν ἀγάπην, ὅτι ἐκεῖνος ὑπὲρ ἡμῶν τὴν ψυχὴν αὐτοῦ ἔθηκεν· καὶ ἡμεῖς ὀφείλομεν ὑπὲρ τῶν ἀδελφῶν τὰς ψυχὰς θεῖναι. 3·17 ὃς 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 καταγινώσκῃ ἡμῶν ἡ

NASB

11 For this is the message which you have heard from the beginning, that we should love one another; 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. 13 Do not be surprised, brethren, if the world hates you. 14 We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brethren. He who does not love abides in death. 15 Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer; and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him. 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. 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? 18 Little children, let us not love with word or with tongue, but in deed and truth.

19 We will know by this that we are of the truth, and will assure our heart before Him 20 in whatever our heart condemns us; for God is greater than our heart and knows all things. 21 Beloved, if our heart does not condemn us, we have

NRSV

1 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

NLT

11 This is the message we have heard from the beginning: We should love one another. 12 We must not be like Cain, who belonged to the evil one and killed his brother. And why did he kill him? Because Cain had been doing what was evil, and his brother had been doing what was right. 13 So don't be surprised, dear brothers and sisters, if the world hates you. 14 If we love our Christian brothers and sisters, it proves that we have passed from death to eternal life. But a person who has no love is still dead. 15 Anyone who hates another Christian is really a murderer at heart. And you know that murderers don't have eternal life within them. 16 We know what real love is because Christ gave up his life for us. And so we also ought to give up our lives for our Christian brothers and sisters. 17 But if anyone has enough money to live well and sees a brother or sister in need and refuses to help — how can God's love be in that person? 18 Dear children, let us stop just saying we love each other; let us really show it by our actions.

19 It is by our actions that we know we are living in the truth, so we will be confident when we stand before the Lord, 20

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 ἐντολάς αὐτοῦ τηροῦμεν καὶ τὰ ἀρεστὰ ἐνώπιον αὐτοῦ ποιοῦμεν.

Notes:

For as long subsection as this is, some exploration of its thought flow is important at the outset. This will enable us to follow the path the ideas travel as we work our way through the verses. These verses represent an enormously complex structuring of ideas. The [semantic diagram](#) in the larger internet version of this study charts one pattern which seems to be take into account the various literary forms and patterns used by the Johannine writer.

The first grouping of ideas is found in verses 11-16 and is focused on loving one another. This is the “message” (ἡ ἀγγελία). The second grouping is verses 17-22 and emphasizes love as action with the resulting spiritual benefits of such a love. This is the “command” from God (ἡ ἐντολὴ αὐτοῦ). The core statement in v. 17 ([diagram #11](#)) stands as the transition from the first to the second groupings, and thus could be linked to either grouping.

The first set of verses (vv. 11-16) begins with the declaration that the message (of the gospel) is to love one another (v. 16). [Brotherly love](#) is a major theme of First John and the Gospel of John. Seven times the emphasis is made in First John: 3:11, 14, 16, 23; 4:4, 11, 12. Four times it is stressed in the Gospel of John: 13:34, 35; 15:12, 17. But it is stressed in Paul’s writings (8 instances) and in First Peter (4x) as well. In an ancient world where cordial relations to other people were uncommon and difficult to establish, the Christian gospel prized a level of sacrificial commitment to others in the community of faith. As Jesus said in Jn 13:35: “By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”

This message of brotherly love is not a new idea dreamed up by the apostles. Rather it is one which “you have heard from the beginning.” The beginning point intended here is the beginning of Jesus’ ministry. Thus the writer roots his admonition in the teaching of

confidence before God; 22 and whatever we ask we receive from Him, because we keep His commandments and do the things that are pleasing in His sight.



have boldness before God; 22 and we receive from him whatever we ask, because we obey his commandments and do what pleases him.

even if our hearts condemn us. For God is greater than our hearts, and he knows everything. 21 Dear friends, if our conscience is clear, we can come to God with bold confidence. 22 And we will receive whatever we request because we obey him and do the things that please him.

Jesus.

What does loving one another mean? In verse 12,



the example of [Cain](#) is used as a negative illustration of how to not do it. Cain was the first born son to Adam and Eve with Abel following him. The story is found in [Genesis four](#) in the Old Testament. When God accepted Abel’s offering over that of Cain, the older brother then murdered his younger brother. Interestingly, nowhere in the Genesis account is any reason given for Cain’s action other than that “so Cain was very angry, and his countenance fell” (v. 5v) when God rejected his offering. In the story, the text states (v. 8): “Cain said to his brother Abel, ‘Let us go out to the field.’ And when they were in the field, Cain rose up against his brother Abel, and killed him.” No mention is made of why Cain did this. But in 1 Jhn. 3:12-13 the motive is asserted from two angels: 1) he was “of the Evil One” (ἐκ τοῦ πονηροῦ ἦν) and 2) “because his own deeds were evil and his brother’s righteous” (ὅτι τὰ ἔργα αὐτοῦ πονηρὰ ἦν τὰ δὲ τοῦ ἀδελφοῦ αὐτοῦ δίκαια). These assertions represent not what the Genesis text directly states. Instead, they represent an inter-

pretation of possible implications of the Genesis account. Cain is mentioned only three times in the New Testament. Heb. 11:4 stresses Abel's action over against Cain's: "By faith Abel offered to God a more acceptable sacrifice than Cain's. Through this he received approval as righteous, God himself giving approval to his gifts; he died, but through his faith he still speaks." Jude 11 makes an allusion to Cain: "Woe to them! For they go the way of Cain, and abandon themselves to Balaam's error for the sake of gain, and perish in Korah's rebellion." Only 1 Jhn 3:11-12 explores in detail the OT episode. Were these assertions about Cain's motivation unique to John? No, [Jewish interpretative tradition](#) had drawn somewhat similar conclusions for a long time before. John simply echoes a commonly held viewpoint here.

But it serves his purpose quite well. Cain becomes a symbol of the world's attitude toward believers in vv. 13-18. Hostility toward those who follow Jesus shouldn't be surprising (v. 13). Just as the world hated Jesus, it hates his disciples (Jn. 15:18-19: "If the world hates you, be aware that it hated me before it hated you. If you belonged to the world, the world would love you as its own. Because you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world—therefore the world hates you." But that, ironically, becomes an affirmation of the genuineness of Christ's followers. The transforming power of Christ's love for his disciples becomes the foundation for the disciples loving one another. That brotherly love then signals authentic transformation (v. 14): "We know that we have passed from death to life because we love one another."

John turns next (v. 15) to a generalized principle with his shift from "we" to "the one who..." The thought flow moves from equating one hating his brother (πᾶς ὁ μισῶν τὸν ἀδελφὸν αὐτοῦ) to equalling a "man killer" (ἀνθρωποκτόνος) to next asserting that no "man killer" can possess eternal life. The universal inclusiveness of this principle is stressed by the adjective "every" (πᾶς). This axiom is preceded by the one in verse 14b: "Whoever does not love abides in death" (ὁ μὴ ἀγαπῶν μένει ἐν τῷ θανάτῳ). The formulaic nature of both axioms link them conceptually, so that John is asserting that "not loving" equals "hating." To not love means to be in spiritual death. Then to hate means to be a murderer and thus not to possess eternal life. Thus John in these two axioms, that are in part derived from the example of Cain, claims that unless we have experienced God's life changing love so that we love one another we have no spiritual life and stand potentially guilty of being a murderer.

Clearly, for John love is a central issue to being an authentic Christian.

He logically turns to the next concern: how do we know real love? In verse 16, a concrete principle of real love is set forth, with Jesus hanging on the cross standing as the background image: "We know love by this, that He laid down His life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren." Central to John's definition of genuine love is self-sacrifice -- to the limits. The model? Jesus himself as He died on the cross for sinful humanity. The demand? We should be willing to go the same distance for the sake of the brethren as Jesus went for us. Thus, Jesus and Cain stand as polar opposites. Jesus is the model for true love; Cain is the model for hating one's brother. If we claim to be Christian, then we must love our brothers in the pattern set for us by Jesus. If we possess hatred then we are walking in the footsteps of Cain and face the same destiny that he faced.

With such concrete imagery in mind, then John presses the issue of brotherly love on a practical level in verse 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?" Not often will we ever be called upon to die for a brother, but frequently we will encounter a brother in physical need. John applies the issue of brotherly love to this lesser demand in the form of a question demanding an answer. Brotherly love is tangible, not abstract. It is practical, not theoretical.

This leads to a climatic admonition in verse 18: "Little children, let us not love with word or with tongue, but in deed and truth." He couches it with the endearing term "little children" (Τεκνία) and states it as "let us..." rather than "you love..." He sees this as a universal principle for all Christians, not just for his initial readers. Love is real and action filled. It is not empty words or a pep talk.

The next section, vv. 19-22, at first seems to be disconnected to what preceded in vv. 11-18. But careful observation of the thought flow, coupled with reflection on life experience, suggests a strong connection between these two units of scripture. The central concern in vv. 18-22 is certainty that we are "of the truth." That certainty provides confidence in approaching God in prayer requests.

Crucial then is the meaning "of the truth" (ἐκ τῆς ἀληθείας). As we discussed in depth in the Excur-sus in the study on [2 Tim. 3:10-17](#) earlier, truth (ἀλήθεια) meant something vastly different to John than it typically does to our world. To be of the truth in a modern setting would generally mean that we

are positioned in a viewpoint that is correct and not false. By reading our modern idea back into John's statement, we make him say that Christians can know that they are orthodox believers rather than heretics by a particular means. John had nothing of this idea in mind what so ever! Rather, his understanding along with Jesus and the other apostles that truth is God and that as Jhn. 14:6 asserts that Jesus is the manifestation of God in the flesh: "I am the truth..." Thus when he says that we can know that we are "of the truth" he is saying that we can know that we are connected to God in character and action. The preposition "of" (ἐκ) signals that our origin is in Truth, that is, in God as our Father. This knowledge then "will reassure our hearts before him" (ἐμπροσθεν αὐτοῦ πείσομεν τὴν καρδίαν ἡμῶν). The image here is of prayer and confidence that we can legitimately come before God in prayerful petitions.



What is the means of gaining this knowledge and thus confidence? The phrase "by this" (ἐν τούτῳ) answers the question. The demonstrative pronoun reaches back to the preceding discussion in vv. 11-18 and especially v. 18. Our love for the brothers expressed in self-sacrificing concrete action is the channel for coming to realize that we genuinely belong to God and thus can approach Him with confidence. This will be reinforced by the causal ("because we keep...") clause in verse. 22b.

Verse 20 sets up a "whenever" situation reflecting our human frailty that happens at times. Down inside we become unsure whether we belong to God or not. Or, in light of the assertion in verse 19a, our uncertainty takes the tone of not being confident about whether we are walking obediently with God or not. In either case, our confidence is broken and doubt sets in. But John reminds us that in such times

we need to focus not upon our doubts but upon God because He "is greater than our hearts, and he knows everything." He understands our situation better than we do, and we can trust Him to bring us into the right path.

Thus in verses 21-22 we are encouraged with the reminder that when we are free from these crippling doubts we can possess confidence to make our requests made known to God in the expectation that He will answer our prayers. The foundation that frees us from doubt and gives us confidence -- "because we keep His commandments and do the things that are pleasing in His sight."

Thus in summarizing verses 11-22, we can see that John has underscored the central role of brotherly love in Christian experience. This stands as a central theme of the gospel message (v. 11) that has been proclaimed beginning with Jesus himself and has continued to be proclaimed by the apostles who followed him. This love is not an empty sentimental feeling toward fellow believers. Rather, it is sacrificial giving of oneself to others, even being willing to give up one's life if necessary. Jesus' own death on the cross stands as the supreme example and model. Such a posture stands as the complete opposite of anger and hatred such as Cain exhibited in his murder of his younger brother Abel. Possessing such hostility signals that one belongs to the world and not to God. Through genuine brotherly love we find assurance that we indeed belong to God, even when other "religious" people claim that we are heretics. Such pressure can produce doubts and break our confidence in coming to God. But the key to gaining confidence to come before God with our petitions is keeping his commandments and doing what pleases Him.

b. Command, vv. 23-24

Greek NT

3:23 καὶ αὕτη ἐστὶν ἡ ἐντολὴ αὐτοῦ, ἵνα πιστεύσωμεν τῷ ὀνόματι τοῦ υἱοῦ αὐτοῦ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ καὶ ἀγαπῶμεν ἀλλήλους, καθὼς ἔδωκεν

NASB

23 This is His commandment, that we believe in the name of His Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, just as He commanded us. 24

NRSV

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

NLT

23 And this is his commandment: We must believe in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ, and love one another, just as he commanded us.

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.

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.

commanded us. 24 All
who obey his command-
ments 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.

24 Those who obey
God's commandments
live in fellowship with him,
and he with them. And we
know he lives in us be-
cause the Holy Spirit lives
in us.

Notes:

If “keeping His commandments and pleasing Him” is so central to confidence in our relationship with the Heavenly Father, then we need to clearly understand what this means. Verses 23-24 define the essence of this.

The second grammar pattern, like the one in verse 11 “this is...”, introduces the material in verse 23: “this is his commandment, that...”. John signals his intention to define God’s commandment. A twofold definition is provided: “we should believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ and love one another.” This echoes somewhat in reverse the twofold indicator of not belonging to God in 3:10 (TEV): “Here is the clear difference between God’s children and the Devil’s children: those who do not do what is right or do not love others are not God’s children.”

How does “believing in the name of Christ” relate to “doing what is right”?

The expression of “believing in the name...” (πιστεύωμεν τῷ ὀνόματι...) first shows up here in the letter, but variations of it will surface two more times. 1) (5:10) “those who believe in the Son of God...” [ὁ πιστεύων εἰς τὸν υἱὸν τοῦ θεοῦ] and 2) (5:13) “you that believe in the name of the Son of God...” [τοῖς πιστεύουσιν εἰς τὸ ὄνομα τοῦ υἱοῦ τοῦ θεοῦ]. In 3:23 such believing is couched as God’s demand. In 5:10 such believing becomes the inner testimony coming from God about His Son as Savior. In 5:13 the entire letter is written to those believing so that they may know they possess life eternal. Additionally, in 4:1 we are warned not to “believe” every spirit; in 4:16, our having believed is equated with experientially knowing how much love God has for His people; in 5:1, everyone believing that Jesus is God’s Son is born of God; in 5:5 the one believing that Jesus is God’s Son is the one who is victorious over the destructive pull of the world; in 5:10, to refuse to believe God (ὁ μὴ πιστεύων τῷ θεῷ ψεύστην πεποίηκεν αὐτόν) is to make God a liar.

These uses of the Greek verb πιστεύω (pisteuo) for ‘believe’ clearly indicate that believing is much more than merely accepting Jesus’ claim to be God’s Son. The inherent dynamic action built into the Greek

word pushes the idea toward the English idea of “entrusting oneself to.” Believing is far deeper than a passive intellectual acceptance of Jesus’ claims. Rather, it is the overt reaching out to Jesus with commitment based on confidence and trust in him. In this sense, believing naturally moves in the direction of “doing what is right” (πάς ὁ μὴ ποιῶν δικαιοσύνην οὐκ ἔστιν ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ) in 3:10. The Greek phrase ποιεῖν δικαιοσύνην (poiein dikaiosunen) elsewhere in the NT is an idiom for expressing one’s piety. Note especially Mt. 6:1 in the Sermon on the Mount: “Beware of practicing your piety before others in order to be seen by them; for then you have no reward from your Father in heaven” (Προσέχετε δὲ τὴν δικαιοσύνην ὑμῶν μὴ ποιεῖν ἔμπροσθεν τῶν ἀνθρώπων πρὸς τὸ θεαθῆναι αὐτοῖς:...). The idiom as used in the NT emphasizes the outward expression of the inner spiritual commitments we have. If we have entrusted our lives to Jesus as God’s Son, the natural expression will be to do obey his commands and do what pleases the Father. Failure to express righteousness outwardly signals the lack of genuine inner commitment.

Thus verse 24a sums up this point: “All who obey his commandments abide in him, and he abides in them.” The heart of His commandment is entrusting one’s life to Jesus and then loving the brothers. In these commitments -- both vertical and horizontal -- comes the continuing presence and power of God.

A final channel of assurance is given in v. 24b, which serves mostly to transition the thought flow into what will be said in 4:1-6 before John returns to the theme of brotherly love again in 4:7-21. The presence of God’s Spirit is the source of assurance that God abides in us. The Spirit’s presence doesn’t produce weird actions such as ‘religious jumping up and down’ according to 4:1-6. First and foremost, the Spirit’s presence and leadership leads us to confess Jesus as God’s Son. This Spirit gives us insight to distinguish between those who confess this same Jesus and those who twist and pervert such a confession.

Thus John’s message is simple: love God and love one another. With that comes assurance that we indeed belong to God with privileges and blessings.

Greek NT

3·11 Ὅτι αὐτὴ ἐστὶν ἡ ἀγγελία ἣν ἠκούσατε ἀπ' ἀρχῆς, ἵνα ἀγαπῶμεν ἀλλήλους, 3·12 οὐ καθὼς Κάϊν ἐκ τοῦ πονηροῦ ἦν καὶ ἔσφαξεν 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 μεταβεβήκαμεν 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 οἶδατε ὅτι πᾶς ἀνθρωποκτόνος οὐκ ἔχει ζωὴν αἰώνιον ἐν αὐτῷ μένουσαν. 3·16 ἐν τούτῳ ἐγνώκαμεν τὴν ἀγάπην, ὅτι ἐκεῖνος ὑπὲρ ἡμῶν τὴν ψυχὴν αὐτοῦ ἔθηκεν· καὶ ἡμεῖς ὀφείλομεν ὑπὲρ τῶν ἀδελφῶν τὰς ψυχὰς θεῖναι. 3·17 ὃς 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 τῆ γλώσσει 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 καταγινώσκῃ ἡμῶν ἡ καρδία, ὅτι μείζων ἐστὶν ὁ θεὸς τῆς καρδίας ἡμῶν

NASB

11 For this is the message which you have heard from the beginning, that we should love one another; 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. 13 Do not be surprised, brethren, if the world hates you. 14 We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brethren. He who does not love abides in death. 15 Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer; and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him. 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. 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? 18 Little children, let us not love with word or with tongue, but in deed and truth.

19 We will know by this that we are of the truth, and will assure our heart before Him 20 in whatever our heart condemns us; for God is greater than our heart and knows all things. 21 Beloved, if our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence before God;

NRSV

1 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

NLT

11 This is the message we have heard from the beginning: We should love one another. 12 We must not be like Cain, who belonged to the evil one and killed his brother. And why did he kill him? Because Cain had been doing what was evil, and his brother had been doing what was right. 13 So don't be surprised, dear brothers and sisters, if the world hates you. 14 If we love our Christian brothers and sisters, it proves that we have passed from death to eternal life. But a person who has no love is still dead. 15 Anyone who hates another Christian is really a murderer at heart. And you know that murderers don't have eternal life within them. 16 We know what real love is because Christ gave up his life for us. And so we also ought to give up our lives for our Christian brothers and sisters. 17 But if anyone has enough money to live well and sees a brother or sister in need and refuses to help — how can God's love be in that person? 18 Dear children, let us stop just saying we love each other; let us really show it by our actions.

19 It is by our actions that we know we are living in the truth, so we will be confident when we stand before the Lord, 20 even if our hearts

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 ἄρεστὰ 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.

22 and whatever we ask we receive from Him, because we keep His commandments and do the things that are pleasing in His sight. 23 This is His commandment, that we believe in the name of His Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, just as He commanded us. 24 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.

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.

condemn us. For God is greater than our hearts, and he knows everything. 21 Dear friends, if our conscience is clear, we can come to God with bold confidence. 22 And we will receive whatever we request because we obey him and do the things that please him. 23 And this is his commandment: We must believe in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ, and love one another, just as he commanded us. 24 Those who obey God's commandments live in fellowship with him, and he with them. And we know he lives in us because the Holy Spirit lives in us.

Greek NT Diagrammed

3:11
1 ὅτι αὕτη ἐστὶν ἡ ἀγγελία ἣν ἠκούσατε ἀπ' ἀρχῆς, ἵνα ἀγαπῶμεν ἀλλήλους, ἐκ τοῦ πονηροῦ οὐ καθὼς Κάϊν... ἦν καὶ ἔσφαξεν τὸν ἀδελφὸν αὐτοῦ.

2 καὶ χάριν τίνος ἔσφαξεν αὐτόν·

3 (ἔσφαξεν αὐτόν) ὅτι τὰ ἔργα αὐτοῦ πονηρὰ ἦν δὲ τὰ τοῦ ἀδελφοῦ αὐτοῦ δίκαια.

3:13
4 καὶ μὴ θαυμάζετε, ἀδελφοί, εἰ μισεῖ ὑμᾶς ὁ κόσμος.

5 3:14 ἡμεῖς οἶδαμεν ὅτι μεταβεβήκαμεν ἐκ τοῦ θανάτου εἰς τὴν ζωὴν, ὅτι ἀγαπῶμεν τοὺς ἀδελφούς·

6 ὁ μὴ ἀγαπῶν μένει ἐν τῷ θανάτῳ.

7 3:15 πᾶς ὁ μισῶν τὸν ἀδελφὸν αὐτοῦ ἀνθρωποκτόνος ἐστίν, καὶ

8 οἶδατε ὅτι πᾶς ἀνθρωποκτόνος οὐκ ἔχει ζωὴν αἰώνιον ἐν αὐτῷ μένουσαν.

3:16
9 ἐν τούτῳ ἐγνώκαμεν τὴν ἀγάπην, ὅτι ἐκεῖνος... τὴν ψυχὴν αὐτοῦ ἔθηκεν ὑπὲρ ἡμῶν καὶ ἡμεῖς ὀφείλομεν... τὰς ψυχὰς θεῖναι ὑπὲρ τῶν ἀδελφῶν.

3:17
10 δ' ὅς ἂν ἔχη τὸν βίον τοῦ κόσμου καὶ θεωρῇ τὸν ἀδελφὸν αὐτοῦ χρεῖαν ἔχοντα καὶ κλείσῃ τὰ σπλάγχνα αὐτοῦ ἀπ' αὐτοῦ,

11 πᾶς ἡ ἀγάπη τοῦ θεοῦ μένει ἐν αὐτῷ.

3-18
12 Τεκνία,
μὴ ἀγαπῶμεν
λόγῳ
μηδὲ
τῇ γλώσσει
ἀλλὰ
13 (ἀγαπῶμεν)
ἐν ἔργῳ
καὶ
ἀληθείᾳ.

3-19
14 Καὶ
ἐν τούτῳ
γνωσόμεθα
ἐκ τῆς ἀληθείας
ὅτι... ἐσμέν,
καὶ
ἔμπροσθεν αὐτοῦ
15 πείσομεν τὴν καρδίαν ἡμῶν,
3-20 ὅτι ἐὰν καταγινώσκῃ ἡμῶν ἡ καρδία,
ὅτι μείζων ἐστὶν ὁ θεὸς
τῆς καρδίας ἡμῶν
καὶ
(ὁ θεὸς) γινώσκει πάντα.

3-21
16 Ἀγαπητοί,
ἐὰν ἡ καρδία ἡμῶν μὴ καταγινώσκῃ,
παρρησίαν ἔχομεν
πρὸς τὸν θεόν
3-22 καὶ
ὁ ἐὰν αἰτῶμεν
17 λαμβάνομεν
ἀπ' αὐτοῦ,
ὅτι τὰς ἐντολὰς αὐτοῦ τηροῦμεν
καὶ
τὰ ἀρεστὰ ἐνώπιον αὐτοῦ ποιοῦμεν.

3-23
18 καὶ
αὕτη ἐστὶν ἡ ἐντολὴ αὐτοῦ,
ἵνα πιστεύσωμεν
τῷ ὀνόματι τοῦ υἱοῦ αὐτοῦ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ
καὶ
ἀγαπῶμεν ἀλλήλους,
καθὼς ἔδωκεν ἐντολήν ἡμῖν.

3-24
19 καὶ
ὁ τηρῶν τὰς ἐντολὰς αὐτοῦ
ἐν αὐτῷ
μένει
20 καὶ
αὐτὸς (μένει)
ἐν αὐτῷ.
καὶ
ἐν τούτῳ
21 γινώσκομεν
ὅτι μένει ἐν ἡμῖν,
ἐκ τοῦ πνεύματος οὗ ἡμῖν ἔδωκεν.

Semantic Diagram

		"Οτι (3:11)									
1.				1	Dec	Pres	---	Ind	3	S	αὕτη
				καὶ (3:12)							
		a) -----		2	Dec	1 Aor	Act	Ind	3	S	(Κόϊν)
		1) -----									
		b) -----		3	(Dec	1 Aor	Act	Ind	3	S	Κόϊν)
		a. -----									
				καὶ (3:13)							
		2) -----		4	Imp	Pres	Act	Imp-	2	P	(ὕμεϊς)
		b. -----		5	Dec	Perf	Act	Ind	1	P	ἡμεῖς
A.											
		1) -----		6	Axim-	Pres	Act	Ind	3	S	Ptc
		a. -----									
		2) -----		7	Axim+	Pres	Act	Ind	3	S	Ptc
				καὶ							
		b. -----		8	Dec	Perf	Act	Ind	2	P	(ὕμεϊς)
		a. -----		9	Dec	Perf	Act	Ind	1	P	(ἡμεῖς)
I.				καὶ (3:17)							
		b. -----		10	Dec	Pres	Act	Ind	1	P	ἡμεῖς
		1. -----		11	Int	Pres	Act	Ind	3	P	ἡ ἀγάπη
		1) -----		Τεκνία (3:18)							
		a. -----		12	Imp	Pres	Act	Imp-	1	P	(ἡμεῖς)
B.				ἀλλὰ							
		2) -----		13	(Imp	Pres	Act	Imp+	1	P	ἡμεῖς)
		a. -----									
		2. -----		Καὶ (3:19)							
		a) -----		14	Dec	Fut	Dep	Ind	1	P	(ἡμεῖς)
		1) -----									
		b) -----		15	Dec	Fut	Act	Ind	1	P	(ἡμεῖς)
		b. -----									
		a) -----		Ἀγαπητοί (3:21)							
		2) -----		16	Dec	Pres	Act	Ind	1	P	(ἡμεῖς)
		b) -----									
				καὶ (3:22)							
		a) -----		17	Dec	Pres	Act	Ind	1	P	(ἡμεῖς)
		b) -----									
A.				καὶ (3:23)							
				18	Dec	Pres	---	Ind	3	S	αὕτη
		1. -----		καὶ (3:24)							
		a) -----		19	Axim	Pres	Act	Ind	2	S	ptc
II.				καὶ							
		2. -----		20	(Axim	Pres	Act	Ind	2	S)	αὐτος
				καὶ							
C.				21	Dec	Pres	Act	Ind	1	P	(ἡμεῖς)