

Although he has already mentioned love as being an evidence of being a child of God earlier in this letter, John now goes into more detail in dealing with why this is so. Christ demonstrated His love by laying down His life for us and so as His children we should be willing to do the same for one another.

The verses in our lesson pick up where John left off in the previous verse as he discusses the love that we should have for one another as Christians. In v. 10 John described a couple of evidences that distinguished children of God from children of the devil: doing righteousness and loving their brother. *“In this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil: whosoever doeth not righteousness is not of God, neither he that loveth not his brother.”* John uses the last phrase to transition into the discussion of love as an evidence of salvation.

¹¹ For this is the message that ye heard from the beginning, that we should love one another.

Love is an evidence of being a child of God because loving one another is the message that Jesus Christ gave us from the start and has been a central characteristic of Christianity ever since. **John 15:12** *“This is my commandment, That ye love one another, as I have loved you.”*

¹² Not as Cain, who was of that wicked one, and slew his brother. And wherefore slew he him? Because his own works were evil, and his brother's righteous. ¹³ Marvel not, my brethren, if the world hate you.

“Not as Cain, who was of that wicked one, and slew his brother” - John contrasts the Christian characteristic of love with an example of the behavior of someone who obviously belonged to the devil: Cain. Cain belonged to the devil and proved it by murdering his brother.

“And wherefore slew he him? Because his own works were evil, and his brother's righteous” - John reminds us of Cain's motive for murdering his brother: jealousy. He was jealous because Abel's righteous works were accepted by God while his own evil works were not. This also points back to v. 10 where righteous works distinguish God's children from the devil's. Abel belonged to God and therefore produced righteous works while Cain belonged to the devil and thus produced evil works.

“Marvel not, my brethren, if the world hate you” - We should not be surprised by the world's hatred of us as Christians for they will also be jealous of us and our righteous works. Our righteousness contrasted against their evil deeds demonstrates how wicked they really are. **John 3:19-20** *“¹⁹ And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. ²⁰ For every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved.”*

¹⁴ We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren. He that loveth not his brother abideth in death. ¹⁵ Whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer: and ye know that no murderer hath eternal life abiding in him.

“We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren” - John very plainly states that the evidence that we have been born of God is that we love one another. There is a bond of love between Christians that the world does not have with one another.

“He that loveth not his brother abideth in death” - Those who do not love other Christians prove that they have not “passed from death unto life” but are still dead in their sins.

“Whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer” - The only thing separating hatred from the act of murder is opportunity. That is, the opportunity to be able to get away with the act, with no fear of judgment or punishment. Hatred carries the idea of wishing a person were dead or did not exist. God takes the attitudes of our heart very seriously. Just as looking on a woman with lust is committing adultery in our heart (Matt. 5:28), so is hatred of a brother the same as committing murder in our heart. In both cases the only thing preventing us from acting on what is in our heart is the opportunity to do it without consequences.

“and ye know that no murderer hath eternal life abiding in him” - No one who belongs to God (and thus having eternal life) could ever be guilty of murder. Thus hatred (having a heart of murder) is a sign that someone does not belong to God.

¹⁶ Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us: and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren.

“Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us” - One way that we recognize that God loves us is the fact that He laid down His life for us on the cross in order to redeem us. John then uses this idea to identify love in God's children.

“and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren” - As children of God we ought to exhibit a family resemblance by loving our brothers and sisters in the Lord enough to give our lives for them as well. This is in stark contrast to those who demonstrate that they are not of God by hating their brother. Rather than wishing for the taking of life, Christians are to have a love that is willing to give their life.

¹⁷ But whoso hath this world's good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him?

John now gets down to where we live, describing the evidence that we love our brother on a daily basis. If we see someone in need and have the ability to help them, do we show love and compassion for them and help them or do we harden our heart toward them? In John's day the bowels were considered to be the seat of emotions, much like we consider the heart today. How can someone who supposedly has the love of God within him/her “shut up” their heart of compassion against a person in need? If they can, then that is evidence that they do not know God, Who is love.

¹⁸ My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth.

John summarizes the previous verse by saying our love shouldn't be limited to just something that we say, for such love is probably not genuine if it doesn't produce actual deeds of love. James says the same thing about faith, for faith (like love) that does not express itself in deeds is worthless: **James 2:14-17** *"¹⁴ What doth it profit, my brethren, though a man say he hath faith, and have not works? can faith save him? ¹⁵ If a brother or sister be naked, and destitute of daily food, ¹⁶ And one of you say unto them, Depart in peace, be ye warmed and filled; notwithstanding ye give them not those things which are needful to the body; what doth it profit? ¹⁷ Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone."*

¹⁹ And hereby we know that we are of the truth, and shall assure our hearts before him.

"And hereby we know that we are of the truth" - The presence of love for fellow Christians in our heart is evidence that God has saved us. God is love and those who are born-again will share this characteristic.

"and shall assure [persuade] our hearts before him" - Recognizing the love in our heart that could only come from God gives us assurance that we indeed have been changed by the Spirit of God. Such assurance gives us peace as well as confidence in prayer, as John discusses in vs. 21-22.

²⁰ For if our heart condemn us, God is greater than our heart, and knoweth all things. ²¹ Beloved, if our heart condemn us not, then have we confidence toward God.

"For if our heart condemn us, God is greater than our heart, and knoweth all things" - Even when we doubt our salvation, God knows whether we belong to Him. God knows that He has done a work in our heart and will honor it despite our doubts.

"Beloved, if our heart condemn us not, then have we confidence toward God" - It is better when we do not doubt our salvation for when we rest in the truth of what God has done for us then we have confidence toward God to live for Him and to fellowship with Him in prayer. Satan wants to neutralize our effectiveness as Christians by causing us to doubt our salvation, for he knows a Christian full of faith can do great things through prayer. **James 5:16** *"Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much."*

²² And whatsoever we ask, we receive of him, because we keep his commandments, and do those things that are pleasing in his sight.

"And whatsoever we ask, we receive of him" - Having the assurance of our salvation gives us confidence to make requests of God in faith. When we don't have such confidence we do not look to God to meet our needs.

"because we keep his commandments, and do those things that are pleasing in his sight" - Knowing that we are saved and are obeying God gives us confidence to ask in prayer. Obedience does not earn answers to prayer but disobedience makes it unlikely that God will grant our requests. Just as a parent is more likely to grant the requests of an obedient child than a disobedient one, God is under no obligation to grant our prayer requests when we are knowingly in disobedience.

²³ And this is his commandment, That we should believe on the name of his Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, as he gave us commandment.

While legalists would give a long list of requirements of what it takes to please God, John gives us God's commandment in two parts:

- **That we should place our faith in Jesus Christ** – Only through faith can we please God.
John 6:28-29 *"²⁸ Then said they unto him, What shall we do, that we might work the works of God? ²⁹ Jesus answered and said unto them, This is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent."*
Heb. 11:6 *"But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him."*
- **That we should love one another** – John did not originate the command to love one another, but it came from Jesus Himself.
John 15:12 *"This is my commandment, That ye love one another, as I have loved you."*

²⁴ And he that keepeth his commandments dwelleth in him, and he in him. And hereby we know that he abideth in us, by the Spirit which he hath given us.

"And he that keepeth his commandments dwelleth in him, and he in him" - Those who keep the commandments to believe on Christ and to love one another are those who are in Christ and Christ is in them. The fact that they are keeping these commandments is evidence that they belong to Him.

"And hereby we know that he abideth in us, by the Spirit which he hath given us" - After establishing that the keeping of Christ's commandments is evidence of salvation, John now transitions into dealing with the evidence that he discusses in chapter 4: the presence of the Holy Spirit in our life. He will warn us to test the spirits to verify whether they are of God, for not everything that claims to be of God truly is from God. The Spirit helps us understand the Bible for He guides us into all truth (John 16:13). He gives us spiritual discernment in the things of God (1 Cor. 2:14).